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The trials and triumphs of **going global**

Historical Committee names contest winners

Examinations of the international church highlighted the winning entries in this year's John Horsch Mennonite History Essay Contest, sponsored by the Mennonite Church USA Historical Committee.

"Fragile Bonds and Global Brotherhood: The Ninth Mennonite World Conference in Curitiba, Brazil" by Meredith Lehman and "Identity in the Midst of Instability: An Analysis of the Oppositional Relationship Between the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Meserete Kristos Church in the 1960s-1980s" by Lydette Assefa tied for first place in the college and university category. Lehman is from Bethel College, North Newton, Kan., and Assefa from Goshen (Ind.) College. Earning second place was Goshen student Matt Harms with "Short-Term Work for Long-Term Change: An Early History of SWAP, DOOR, and Group Venture."

Excerpts from Lehman's and Assefa's papers are in this issue of *Mennonite Historical Bulletin*.

In the graduate school and seminary category, Joshua Weaver of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind., had the winning entry with "Idolatry, Baptism, and the Theology of Pilgrim Marpeck." Brett Klingenberg of Eastern Mennonite Seminary, Harrisonburg, Va., was second with "The Theology and Visibility of Economic Reform in Martin Luther and Menno Simons."

"The Way They Chose: The Creation of the Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church" by Benjamin Paulding, a home-schooled student from York Springs, Pa., won the high school category. Second place went to "A Mennonite Response to Domestic Violence: Why Past Reactions Must Lead to Present and Future Actions" by Tonya Wagner, while "Mennonite Persecution in Russia During the Early 1900s" by Ellen Wiens was third. Both are students at Westgate Mennonite Collegiate in Winnipeg.

Nineteen students entered this year's contest. Judges were Rachel Waltner Goossen of Topeka, Kan.; Jean Kilheffer Hess of Lancaster, Pa.; and Gerlof Homan of Normal, Ill.



Lehman



Assefa

Mennonites hit harder in last major flu outbreak

As concerns intensify regarding the H1N1 flu, interest has returned to the last great flu pandemic: the devastating swine flu 90 years ago. The Mennonites of Manitoba were hit especially hard. A recent study examined "excess deaths" (the number of deaths above normal expectations) in four southern Manitoba municipalities with high concentrations of Mennonites between November 1918 and January 1919.

The differences between Mennonite and non-Mennonite flu fatalities are striking. In two municipalities, the number of Mennonite deaths per 1,000 was about double that of their non-Mennonite neighbors. A third reported nearly three times as many deaths among Mennonites than non-Mennonites, and in fourth, the difference was an incredible eight to one.

The study's researchers posited several theories for this phenomenon. One possibility is that close family relationships resulted in less genetic diversity and thus less ability to ward off the disease. Another possible explanation is the era's religious and social context. The practice of Mennonites attending services in different districts, often followed by much socializing in homes, would produce interaction with, and exposure to and infection of, a wide range of people. The flu's spread would have also been facilitated by the communal activity of butchering hogs, typically done in October and November. —*Preservings*

Archivist passes recertification exam

James Lynch, assistant archivist at the Mennonite Church USA Historical Committee Archives in North Newton, Kan., has renewed his standing in

the Academy of Certified Archivists. In August he successfully completed the recertification exam, which covers archival practices and standards.

Lynch has served at the North Newton Archives since 2000. He previously was an archivist at the American Baptist Historical Society in Rochester, N.Y. Lynch was been a member of the Academy of Certified Archivists since 1998.

John Thiesen, archivist at the North Newton Archives, is also a member of the academy. Certification is good for five years.

Low German-language trends documented in Kansas study

The loss of German-language proficiency was a common 20th-century development in many North American Mennonite communities. Researchers have identified several stages in the decrease in Plautdietsch, or Low German, among Russian Mennonite groups in Kansas.

Those born prior to 1917 grew up in a Plautdietsch-speaking environment. English was usually not encountered until children started public school. Those born between 1918 and 1927 also grew up with Plautdietsch but also some English. German-language summer schools and worship services were still held. But for those born between 1928 and 1947, the summer schools and worship services had begun to disappear, although they still had some Plautdietsch exposure at home. Those born between 1948 and 1957 had little contact with Plautdietsch, and German was largely confined to foreign-language instruction in school. Finally, those born between 1958 and 1967 had almost no exposure to Plautdietsch. —*Yearbook of German-American Studies*



Longest-serving Mennonite college presidents

1. Lloyd Ramseyer, Bluffton (Ohio) University, 27 years (1938-1965)
2. Henry W. Lohrenz, Tabor College, Hillsboro, Kan., 23 years (1908-1931)
3. D.H. Bender, Hesston (Kan.) College, 21 years (1909-1930)
4. Edmund G. Kaufman, Bethel College, North Newton, Kan., 20 years (1932-1952)
5. Harold S. Schultz, Bethel College, North Newton, Kan., 20 years (1971-1991)

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Fragile bonds and global fellowship

The ninth Mennonite World Conference assembly in Curitiba, Brazil

by Meredith Lehman

Curitiba, Brazil, ca. 1962. Ten years later the city would host the first Mennonite World Conference assembly to be held outside Europe or North America.

Mennonite Church USA Archives-Goshen

The decision to hold the ninth Mennonite World Conference assembly in Curitiba, Brazil, in 1972 generated controversy among many Mennonites in Europe and North America, ostensibly due to concerns about tacitly sanctioning an oppressive military dictatorship in the host nation. Beyond this debate about social justice and the church's political role, however, the international gathering in Curitiba was a critical turning point in addressing many challenges of a shifting global church community. The first world conference held outside Europe or North America and by far the most diverse in attendance, Curitiba, with its theme "Jesus Christ Reconciles," became a stage for dialogue and reconciliation among increasingly disparate factions of the global church.

Between 1925, when the first gathering was held, and 1967, the purpose and focus of MWC continually shifted to meet the needs of the evolving global church.¹ The 1925 event, in Basel, Switzerland, was largely a historical celebration, commemorating the 400-year anniversary of the first adult baptisms and the birth of the Anabaptist movement. Representation consisted of church members from France, Germany and the Netherlands, as well as a single North American delegate. Although there was no attempt in Basel to establish MWC as a mechanism for overarching Mennonite initiatives or theological statements, the initial conference set a precedent for communication and cooperation among disparate and independent groups of Mennonites.

Unlike its predecessor, the 1930 gathering in Danzig was held with an explicit and practical aim: to encourage and coordinate aid to Mennonite refugees fleeing famine and oppression in Russia. Attendance was again primarily European, with six delegates from the United States and Canada. But representation gradually expanded in number and diversity. The fourth conference, held jointly in North Newton, Kansas, and Goshen, Indiana, in 1948, was the first to venture away from the historic cradle of Anabaptism in Europe. In addition, the 1948 conference was the first to include non-Western Mennonites, with eight delegates total from Paraguay, Brazil, India, and China, representing the burgeoning international church. Subsequent gatherings in Switzerland, Germany, Canada, and the Netherlands continued to see modest non-Western representation, with 12 nations sending delegates to the eighth conference in 1967 in Amsterdam.

The first eight MWC gatherings reflected a conception of the global church as a collection of ethnic Swiss, German, and Dutch Mennonites with ancestral ties to the Radical Reformation of 16th-century Europe. Although churches outside Europe and North America began sending representatives in 1948, MWC remained an implicit celebration of

European Anabaptism. As the location and representation of the ninth conference were being considered, however, church leaders were determined they should take into account the rapidly changing demographics of the global Mennonite church. According to statistics presented at the January 6, 1968, meeting of the MWC Presidium, North America had 197,000 Mennonites and Brethren in Christ, while Europe could claim 99,000. Elsewhere, Africa had 60,297 adherents; Asia, 57,202; and Latin America, 29,724.² Those numbers were far from insignificant. More than one-third of global Anabaptists lived in the developing world, and the vast majority of those were of non-European descent.

Seeking unity and brotherhood beyond ethnic or historical ties became a defining purpose of the ninth MWC assembly. South American Mennonites in particular hoped to forge closer ties with the global brotherhood and had, in fact, previously issued an invitation for the 1967 conference. At a 1963 meeting of the MWC General Council, representatives from both the Netherlands and South America presented invitations and discussed the advantages of their respective locations. The Dutch statement was a clear appeal to reinforcement of traditional Mennonite bonds, such as strengthening “the bridges built between Europe and American Mennonites” at the previous assembly in Canada, and noting that “the Netherlands are relatively accessible to all European Mennonites.”³

In contrast, the South American invitation was a tentative call for change. Said South American representative Peter Wiens, “To have the conference in South America would provide a real inspiration to the churches and to the evangelical cause in an area of rising mission activity.” But he acknowledged that he was “not certain whether South America was ready for the conference” for organizational reasons. The General Council chose the Netherlands as the 1967 site, with the qualification that every effort should be made to hold the next assembly in South America, explaining, “It

Seeking unity and brotherhood beyond ethnic or historical ties became a defining purpose of the ninth MWC assembly.



C.J. Dyck

Mennonite Church USA Archives-Goshen

is clear that world Mennonites must do more for South America; to go to the Netherlands is not a decision against the South American brotherhood.”⁴

The South Americans reiterated their desire to become more involved at a 1966 meeting of the MWC Presidium in Filadelfia, Paraguay. Abram Dueck of Curitiba hoped for a South American-hosted conference as an alternative to the previous assemblies, saying, “The ties linking North American Mennonites to European Mennonites are strong and that road is much travelled. The ties linking North America and South America are much weaker.”⁵ Other South Americans in attendance expressed hopes for invigoration of local mission work and reassertion of Mennonite identity. But perhaps the most common sentiment was a need to “work together ... to preserve, perpetuate, and strengthen the Mennonite world brotherhood.”⁶ The MWC leadership concurred, and the South Americans were asked to renew their invitation, which they did. The Presidium unanimously accepted it and chose Curitiba as the host city due to its superior hotel accommodations and strong recommendations from South American representatives.⁷

While Curitiba was obviously a significant selection, it is notable that the list of South American Mennonites who brought their invitation to MWC consisted of Henrique Ens, Woldemar Ens, Peter Dueck, David Koop, Jakob Duerksen, Heinrich Duerksen, Ernst Harder, and Raul Garcia—all but Garcia were ethnic Germanic Mennonite immigrants to Latin America rather than native Latin Americans.⁸ In fact, the South American delegation’s invitation to host the 1972 assembly was originally extended not in Spanish or Portuguese but in German. Thus reaching out to the South American Mennonites was not such a great departure from traditional ethnic Anabaptist links as meeting in Ethiopia or Indonesia might have been.

In spite of the strong immigrant Mennonite presence in South America, however, the decision to host the 1972 assembly remained a significant overture to Mennonites throughout the developing world and in South America in particular. In 1969, Henrique Ens spoke

for South American Mennonites who were already heavily involved in planning for the 1972 conference:

The more we talk about plans for preparation for this event, the more we become aware of what a MWC in South America could mean to all of us. Thousands of South American Mennonites who have not been able to attend any of the previous MWC, always held either in North America or Europe, can now be actively involved in the preparation work and actively participate in the planning as such.⁹



As the Presidium was planning for a broader and more representative global gathering, they were also considering a theme around which to build programming for such an unprecedented event. The Presidium settled on reconciliation as a theme that spoke to the work and hopes of the church on “personal, social, and international” levels, deciding specifically on the formulation “Jesus Christ reconciles.”¹⁰ But as MWC leadership proclaimed the assembly’s theme, controversy broke out regarding Brazil as the location for the coming MWC. Presidium minutes described the initial unforeseen dispute over questions of political freedom in the host country:

An intensive discussion developed out of the statement of Henrique Ens that there is freedom of speech in Brazil, but there would nevertheless be danger of misunderstanding if participants presumed to speak as visitors to local Brazilian social or other issues in the now popular tone of radicality and revolution. This could work itself out negatively for the Mennonites in Brazil and South America.¹¹

This concern was set aside with general agreement that the Mennonites would not overstep their bounds as guests in the country. Among many Mennonites,

however, it was not so easy to ignore the possibility of limited political expression, and what was often referred to as the “Brazil issue” would become a defining challenge of the Curitiba conference.

Accusations of political oppression and torture under the Brazilian military dictatorship had become popular fodder for North American and European news outlets in the months and years prior to the Curitiba decision. Many Mennonites followed, with some trepidation, news of the political situation in the chosen site for their international assembly. Their reservations were given further legitimacy when on June 5, 1970, the Lutheran World Fellowship abruptly moved its planned July assembly from Porto Alegre, Brazil, to the French town of Evian-Les Baines. According to LWF General Secretary Andre Appel, the assembly was moved due to concerns about working with the Brazilian government, and because “serious doubts existed that free discussion of issues—including conditions in Brazil—could take place and some fear that such attempts might result in demonstrations or other problems.”¹²

On June 9, 1970, only four days after the decision to relocate the LWF assembly, Dutch Mennonite leaders held a meeting

and issued a call to do as the Lutherans did, otherwise they would send no representatives to Curitiba. MWC executive secretary C.J. Dyck of the United States expressed optimism that an acceptable solution could be reached, acknowledging that MWC had unofficially begun exploring alternate locations in case of controversy. He reiterated, however, a common hope to preserve the inclusive spirit of the Curitiba decision, saying, “You know how badly we all want the 9th MWC session to meet in the ‘third world.’”¹³

Meanwhile, South American Mennonites were startled by the Dutch threat of abstention and moved to defend the Curitiba decision. Henrique Ens wrote a letter to Dyck advising a biblical rather than political assembly. Ens firmly rebuked the Dutch opposition to Curitiba on political grounds, citing among other things the hypocrisy of Mennonites “in countries with a long tradition of inhuman colonialism such as Holland ... whose greatest interest in a Mennonite World Conference in Latin America is to demonstrate an aggressive opinion on ‘social injustice’ and ‘solidarity with the poor and oppressed.’”¹⁴ He went on to say that if Mennonites hoped to use the Curitiba event as a platform for statements on social injustices in Latin America, “Brazil is not the right place for such a conference.”¹⁵

While the Curitiba assembly met under the theme of “Jesus Christ Reconciles,” the event and its planning revealed distinct disagreements among the members of the expanding international Mennonite fellowship.

Mennonite Church USA Archives-Goshen



A Latin American expressed concern that the Dutch Mennonites would bring a radical or revolutionary agenda to the conference.

The controversy brought to light a number of ideological tensions in the increasingly diverse global church, reflecting pronounced differences in both religious and political ideology. Whereas Mennonites in developed, democratic nations tended to be vocal and unequivocal in their opposition to Brazil's military dictatorship, Latin American Mennonites perceived these attitudes as uninformed, condescending and even shrouded in dangerous radicalism. The Dutch Mennonites who opposed the Brazil selection posed their complaint as a question of totalitarianism versus democracy, with opposition to totalitarianism being a necessary condition of an authentic Anabaptist gathering. J.A. Oosterbaan, the MWC Presidium's vice president for Europe, brought the Dutch concerns to an ad hoc meeting of the Presidium in Curitiba in January 1971: "The Dutch feel strongly against any form of totalitarianism; they would find it impossible not to express protest. ... It is part of the Anabaptist-Mennonite heritage to be democratic. This witness must point to the third alternative; neither militarism nor communism, but democracy."¹⁶

Responses to the Dutch statement indicated that such hopes were out of touch with Latin Americans' experience. Comments recorded in the minutes as representative of the discussion include a number of implying Dutch support for leftist ideologies and defending the Brazilian government. According to one Brazilian Mennonite, "We had thanksgiving services when this military regime took over because we know from experience in Russia what communism would be like. It may be innocent in Holland, but not once it takes over."¹⁷ Another Latin American expressed concern that the Dutch Mennonites would bring a radical or revolutionary agenda to the conference, saying, "We are shocked that the Dutch young people have been asked to study the writings of Ernesto (Che) Guevara's writing in preparation for the 9th MWC, according to a report in the *Mennonite Weekly Review*."¹⁸ The report to which he was likely referring, a brief news

item on a conference in the Netherlands about the Latin American context, was not especially indicative of fervent revolutionary sentiment among Dutch Mennonites; according to the article, "The conference studied various Latin American social and political problems including Ernesto Che Guevara's revolution."¹⁹ Nevertheless, it is clear that many Latin American Mennonites perceived the Dutch as sympathetic to radical or communist ideologies, and the resultant rift presented a great threat to global Mennonite fellowship.



Political clashes between Latin American Mennonites and those who criticized their governments were at the forefront of the Brazil location conflict. But what initially appeared to be primarily a conflict of opposing political ideologies soon exposed critical differences in theology within the global Mennonite community. The Latin Americans hoped to minimize conflict and ensure their congregations' continued good standing with local authorities by imposing a "no politics" limitation on conference content. The idea of removing politics altogether, however, presented theological problems for many other Mennonites. "Our Curitiba conversations ... have shown us how difficult it is to draw a clear line between religious and social concerns and their political implications," Dyck said.²⁰

He spoke of the increasingly theological aspects of the months-long Curitiba debate that had grown to include the broader Mennonite church through articles and letters in various Mennonite publications. The editor of the Canadian Mennonite Brethren publication *Mennonitsche Rundschau*, Erich L. Ratzlaff, wrote an editorial in October 1970 that was reprinted in English in *The Mennonite* in December. Ratzlaff was responding to "Militarism Blocks Social Reform in Brazil" by Delton Franz, director of Mennonite Central Committee's Washington, D.C., office, which reflected negatively on the country's regime. Ratzlaff discounted Franz's take,

which had been published earlier in *The Mennonite*, as dangerously extreme. "It is ... completely obvious that this article gives moral support to the left radical elements in South America," he wrote.²¹ Rather than simply attacking Franz on political grounds, however, Ratzlaff came to a decidedly theological conclusion:

It is true that in many parts of the world social injustice prevails. ... The world without God and without Christ is after its own way unrighteous and will always be that way. Only by turning to Jesus Christ can the nature of man be changed. Constantly will remain the command of Jesus to build his kingdom which is not of this world.²²

For Ratzlaff and other like-minded Mennonites, true Christian faith was based in separatism and could only be corrupted by worldly political entanglements. As such, the Dutch threat to abstain from the conference on political grounds was deemed theologically errant. In contrast, however, others claimed that a potentially apolitical world conference would in fact be detached from the essential social aspect of Christianity. In a particularly biting letter to *The Mennonite*, Canadian William Klassen scoffed at the idea of a non-political conference:

I would like to propose that no reference be made in the conference to the lordship of Christ, for that has always been a clearly political category. ... Furthermore, there should be no worship at the World Conference because we have been repeatedly told by our theologians that worship is a political act. The purpose, therefore, of the next World Conference should be to come together and congratulate ourselves that we have found a place to meet where we are safe and the government likes us.²³

Thus the Mennonites who spoke out in response to the Curitiba controversy tended to reflect two notably different spiritual

perspectives, leaning toward an emphasis on either inward or outward expressions of Christianity.

As conflict over the Curitiba location unfolded, Dyck frequently acted as a mediator, often invoking distinctly Anabaptist hopes for reconciliation and brotherhood in the Holy Spirit. In his correspondence with Henrique Ens, he implored South American Mennonites to

seize any opportunities for conversation and fellowship with the Dutch, saying, "The theme, 'Jesus Christ Reconciles,' must apply in the brotherhood before we can hope to speak to the larger society."²⁴ Dyck similarly encouraged Oosterbaan and the Dutch Mennonites to embrace global church fellowship as an opportunity for discernment, saying in a November 1970 letter, "We want to continue to be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit as He speaks to us through the voices of the total brotherhood."²⁵

Although Dyck and other members of the Presidium took seriously the Dutch concerns and considered changing the conference location, they always approached such possibilities with the reconciliation of the broader community in mind. Determined to bring together rather than alienate dissenting factions, the Presidium was careful to maintain strong ties with the Dutch Mennonites despite ultimately deciding against their request for a different location. The Dutch eventually reached a compromise among themselves, resolving to send a limited delegation of two rather than the requested nine representatives. Dyck was pleased with this result, and in his correspondence with Oosterbaan, he



Brazilian Henrique Ens, a member of the Mennonite World Conference Presidium, was a leading advocate for holding an assembly in South America.

Mennonite Church USA Archives-Goshen



A crowd gathers for the dedication of a new Mennonite church in Curitiba. The area's large concentration of Mennonites originates in the 1930s when Russian refugees started arriving.

Mennonite Church USA Archives-Goshen

made clear the value of dissent in the ongoing process of discernment as a global fellowship:

Your cablegram and your letter [about the Dutch decision] have both reached us by now and have stirred in us deep and warm feelings of gratitude and brotherhood. The Dutch Mennonite brotherhood has rendered a significant service to the entire Mennonite World Conference in calling our attention to conditions which exist in Brazil and in other parts of the Third World altering conditions for the holding of world conferences. For this we are thankful.²⁶

As the ninth Mennonite World Conference assembly went ahead as planned in Curitiba and the Dutch Mennonites resolved to participate nevertheless, the Presidium goal of reconciliation within the brotherhood appeared to have been advanced.

Although it was held with an official “no politics” mandate as requested by the Latin American churches, the Curitiba assembly was not without political expression and subsequent conflict. An article titled “On Brazil’s Political Situation”

was published in the conference booklet *Os Menonitas* that was widely distributed prior to the event. Author Brazilian Mennonite Gerhard Klassen was decidedly complimentary toward his country’s current regime: “Eight years ago ... the extremely leftist government of João Goulart was ousted. The military, supported by Christian families and right-wing political parties, intervened; to the joy and appreciation of the populace.”²⁷ The article was presented as an informative piece but was understandably perceived by many as a pointed critique of opposition to the Brazil location as well as an apparent breach of the Brazilians’ own non-political conference stipulation. The Presidium acknowledged that the article “should probably not have been included,” but emphasized that “the book is not an ‘official’ document” of Mennonite World Conference.²⁸

On the other side of the political debate were those who hoped or attempted to circumvent the “no politics” limitation by bringing issues of social justice in Latin America to the fore. Although Brazilian Mennonites had been most concerned about radical impositions on the conference by Europeans and North Americans, it was several Latin American Mennonites who were most outspoken against their own governments. Three Latin American men took the stage following Colombian Armando Hernandez’s Spanish-language sermon during the Sunday-morning worship service in order to make an unscheduled and politically charged declaration. According to an account in *The Mennonite*, “Almost it seemed as though the whole service would be interrupted by strong action on the desperate socioeconomic

plight of Latin America’s masses.”²⁹ Henrique Ens, MWC president Erland Waltner of the United States, and conference chairman Hans Wiens quickly convinced the group to relinquish the stage, and local Mennonite authorities collected copies of the declaration that had already been distributed.

The disruption highlighted an underlying dissatisfaction that many felt with the decidedly non-political agenda of the conference. Peter Dyck, MCC director for Europe and North America, reflected on these frustrations:

There was not enough grappling with certain deeper issues that divide and consequently reconciliation at that level was scarcely talked about let alone achieved. ... The abortive attempt to surface some of these problems on Sunday morning was unfortunate because it was at the wrong time and the wrong place, but it is an indication of unresolved ramblings under the surface.³⁰



But even as ideological differences persisted throughout and beyond the assembly, those who attended experienced a gratifying and unprecedented display of global fellowship. Although Peter Dyck was among those who expressed frustration with the limitations of the conference, he nevertheless applauded the diversity of the brotherhood in Curitiba came away with hope for the future of the global Mennonite church:

The unique feature was the presence of nonethnic-cultural Mennonites from 30 or more nations. That was great! World

Conferences from now on will never be the same. ... It was a truly great conference, and I am confident the Holy Spirit will continue his work of reconciliation as the 1,800 visitors bring the message and spirit of the conference back to their local congregations.³¹

The official conference message, adopted at the final delegate session on July 23, 1972, acknowledged the ideological diversity of the global church and affirmed the fundamental role of conflict and communal discernment in the vitality of the brotherhood:

There does not have to be a dissent between those in our brotherhood whose priority lies in the area of personal salvation and those who see it as their primary duty to promote an active program for the liberation of mankind from all forms of oppression and injustice because both are aspects of the reconciling work of Christ. Nevertheless there is dissension which calls for further repentance and reconciliation. The emphasis upon the total witness should lead us as a people to talk to each other understandingly and not to avoid each other.³²

Thus the culminating statement of the conference in Curitiba was an expression of fellowship transcending political and theological tension within an increasingly diverse global church. Amid conflict and uncertainty, the ninth Mennonite World Conference assembly set a significant precedent for global brotherhood in spite of, and perhaps even sustained by, dissent and diversity.

Endnotes

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- 12 "Lutherans switch rather than fight," *National Catholic Reporter* (June 1970).
- 13 Cornelius J. Dyck to J.A. Oosterbaan, June 23, 1970, Box 13 (Large), File 56, Mennonite Church USA Archives, Goshen.
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- 15 Ibid.
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- 30 Peter Dyck, "Not Enough Grappling With Deeper Issues," *Mennonite Weekly Review* 50, no. 33 (August 17, 1972): 5.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 "The Ninth Mennonite World Conference: Conference Message," *Jesus Christ Reconciles: Proceedings of the Ninth Mennonite World Conference, Curitiba, Brazil, July 18-23, 1972*, Cornelius J. Dyck, ed. (Evangel Press: Nappanee, Indiana, 1972): XXV.

Identity in the midst of instability

Stories of conversion in Ethiopia

by Lydette Assefa

A camel caravan makes its way across the Ethiopian terrain, a traditional site in the East African country. Also traditional was the close relationship between the government and the Orthodox Church, which helped the fledgling Meserete Kristos Church attract converts.

Mennonite Church USA Archives-Goshen

At two o'clock on a Tuesday afternoon in 1972, Getaneh Ayele¹ a young high school student living in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, heard a voice.² "Come out of this place," the voice commanded. "I will show you the right place." With considerable alarm and unease, Getaneh left the house where he was living to heed the voice's instruction. At each intersection and fork in the road, the voice commanded him, "Go this way" or "Go that way." At the end of his walk, Getaneh found himself facing a building with a small poster on the front reading, "Meserete Kristos Church."



Growing up in a rural community outside Addis Ababa,³ Getaneh identified himself as an Orthodox Christian. Like many devout Orthodox parents, his parents wanted him and his brothers to become deacons in the church, so Getaneh studied in the Orthodox priest school, beginning at the age of 4. After learning the Amharic alphabet, Orthodox worship music, and prayer recitation, he became a deacon at the age of 7. The aspiration of Getaneh's parents for him to continue with his formal church involvement was cut short when Getaneh moved in with his relatives in Addis, at the age of 12, to receive higher education. But Getaneh continued to identify himself as a member of the Orthodox Church.

So he was astounded as he stood in front of this Protestant, evangelical church. Upon entering, Getaneh found a small group of people listening to a man teaching Scripture. At the end of the sermon, the pastor asked for individuals willing to dedicate their lives to Christ to come forward. Again the voice came and said, "This is Jesus Christ, your God, your Savior. I am not a different God; I am your God." In response to the voice, Getaneh immediately moved to the front of the church, accepted Jesus as his personal Savior, and experienced an instant joy in his decision to follow Christ. After returning home, his relatives noticed a change in him and, learning of this new religion, felt threatened. Soon they asked him to choose between his newfound faith and his family. To his family's demand, Getaneh simply replied, "I don't know anything about a new religion. All I know is that Jesus Christ is my Savior." The next day Getaneh left his home and went to the Meserete Kristos Church (MKC).

Getaneh's conversion is one voice in a larger movement of conversions of young people to MKC during the three decades after it began in 1962.⁴ His story raises provocative questions about the relationship between the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the MKC and the context of converts' decisions to leave the church of their parents and their birth. By examining the

life narratives and faith stories of numerous MKC converts,⁵ this paper analyzes the historical, political, and cultural context of Ethiopia in the 1960s and 1970s as well as the histories of both the MKC and Orthodox Church.

Ethiopia has boasted a long and rich Christian heritage through the union of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba in the 10th century B.C.E. As a result of this union, Ethiopian rulers claimed to be heirs of the line of Judah, ultimately linking themselves to Christ. The Orthodox Church and the state became intertwined as Ethiopian emperors defined themselves in terms of a religious identity that was propagated by the church. For much of its history, Ethiopia operated as a theocracy, with the emperor swearing at coronation "to protect and maintain Christian faith" and received the blessing of the patriarch of the Orthodox Church.⁶ The church benefited from this privileged relationship in the significant economic wealth it received from the state. The Orthodox Church was one of the country's largest landowners and, until the Communists came to power in 1974, received an annual budget of 60-70 million Ethiopian birr from the state.⁷ In this way, both the church and the state had a mutually beneficial interdependence.

But the religious landscape slowly began shifting in the late 19th century as small Protestant movements appeared throughout Ethiopia. Mennonites first arrived in 1946 as medical workers, as Emperor Haile Salassie sought to rebuild the country following the destruction left by the Italian occupation during World War II. An Anabaptist church subsequently developed and was formally established in 1959, calling itself Meserete Kristos Church, meaning "Christ Is the Foundation Church," based on 1 Corinthians 3:11.⁸

Haile Salassie's postwar rebuilding efforts, done with the help of Western allies, implemented Western policies that opened the country to land privatization, capitalist entrepreneurship, industrial productivity, and a booming export

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business.⁹ But the country's growth came at the expense of peasants and rural people. Much development was concentrated in the capital city of Addis Ababa and other urban areas, and private entrepreneurship was mainly a self-advancement tool of the oligarchy connected with the imperial family.¹⁰ For the majority of the Ethiopian population, modernity meant higher taxes and a small amount of imported goods,¹¹ as the church and elite landholders were exempt from the frequent land tax increases.¹² In addition, Haile Selassie's new land tenure system further alienated rural people from development by parceling out land to loyal elites and demoting peasants from farmers to tenants.¹³ Numerous regional rebellions against the unpopular land taxes and several deadly droughts and famines in the late 1960s and 1970s exacerbated the situation.¹⁴

In the midst of these social upheavals, Haile Selassie sought to secure his permanence with a formal alliance and support from the Orthodox Church. In 1955, he instituted a new constitution that provided a legal charter that united him with the Orthodox Church as protector of the official church of the empire.¹⁵ While rural Ethiopians suffered under new taxes and land tenure policies, the Orthodox Church remained wealthy under this system, maintaining ownership of one-third of the country's total land.¹⁶



This social and political instability continued to heighten throughout the 1960s and climaxed in the early 1970s amid the protests and riots that ushered in the Communist regime. On September 12, 1974, Haile Selassie was overthrown by military forces, later called the Coordinating Committee of Armed Forces (*Derg* in Amharic).¹⁷ Frustrated and disillusioned by an empty and autocratic government and state church, students responded through their discovery of the power and assurance of religious transformation. Young converts were attracted to the MKC by its spiritual vitality and revivalist worship culture and

thus carved out a new cultural, social, and spiritual identity over and against the Orthodox Church.

One example is Tadesse Negawo. He was born in 1948 in Dorene in the Arsi province in south central Ethiopia.¹⁸ His parents were farmers and attended the Orthodox Church and ceremonies occasionally. As a child, Tadesse also nominally practiced Orthodoxy but later became stronger in his faith and regularly worshipped, fasted, and celebrated saints' days. In 1967, he began classes at the Teachers Training Institute in Harar, eastern Ethiopia, where he experienced emptiness and depression. One Saturday night on campus, Tadesse was walking around the school grounds contemplating suicide when he met one of his classmates on his way to a Bible study. He invited Tadesse to come along.

This simple invitation was the beginning of a major change in his life. His friend took him to a family's house near campus where there were many chairs placed throughout the house. When the preaching and singing began, Tadesse was moved by the powerful words and assurances of God's love and faithfulness. "You will not die, you will live. Jesus Christ died for you." Those words touched my heart," he said. "I became hopeful to live. I stopped my desire of suicide." Two years later, Tadesse finished school and began preaching, eventually becoming an MKC evangelist and elder in the early 1980s.

Many converts also sought to orient themselves amidst the political and social instability of the 1970s and early 1980s. Beyene Demissie was born in 1956 and grew up in Hossana, in southern Ethiopia.¹⁹ His grandfather was a feudal leader in his area and established the Orthodox Church in Hossana, for which he was awarded a palace. Beyene's father grew up studying Orthodox literature, rituals, and, liturgy. Despite this strong Orthodox tradition, however, Beyene had many unanswered questions.

In 1977, 21-year-old Beyene became involved in the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front, a counterrevolutionary force that opposed the

Derg's extermination of political dissidents. Because of his support, he was forced to flee from Nazareth to Assela to escape persecution. On the eve of his departure, Beyene saw more than 30 bodies of his friends strewn on the street, killed in one day as a result of their membership in the EPRDF. In this moment of fear, anxiety, and grief, Beyene asked, "If I die, where is my destiny?" That night he went to his bedroom and asked God for help. As he prayed, Beyene remembered a hated acquaintance who had talked to him about Jesus in the past. With new yearning and perspective, Beyene returned to the acquaintance and asked again for counsel and spiritual assurance. Beyene knelt down with this acquaintance, who laid his hands on him and prayed for him. "I became very happy," Beyene remembered. "I was free at that time. That was my second birthday."

Another catalyst for conversion to the MKC was the urge to break with the past, largely symbolized by the Orthodox Church, and create a new identity. In contrast to the patriarchal Orthodox tradition practiced by their parents and grandparents, many young MKC converts found new meaning in a faith tradition that they could choose and own. Conversion became a form of identity shift as young people aligned themselves with a faith story uniquely different from the established Orthodox narrative.

For Negash Kebede, this desire to identify with something new became a significant element of his conversion experience. His decision to align himself with MKC began with his proximity to the Mennonites.²⁰ Born in 1942 in Bedeno, in the Harar region, Negash grew up in a traditional Orthodox home near the Mennonite mission and school, which were established in 1951. After completing grades one through seven at the school, Negash taught fourth- and fifth-grade students at the school.

Although he identified himself with the mission as a child, it was only later that Negash accepted the Mennonite faith. While he taught at the mission school, he was attracted to an MKC fellowship that

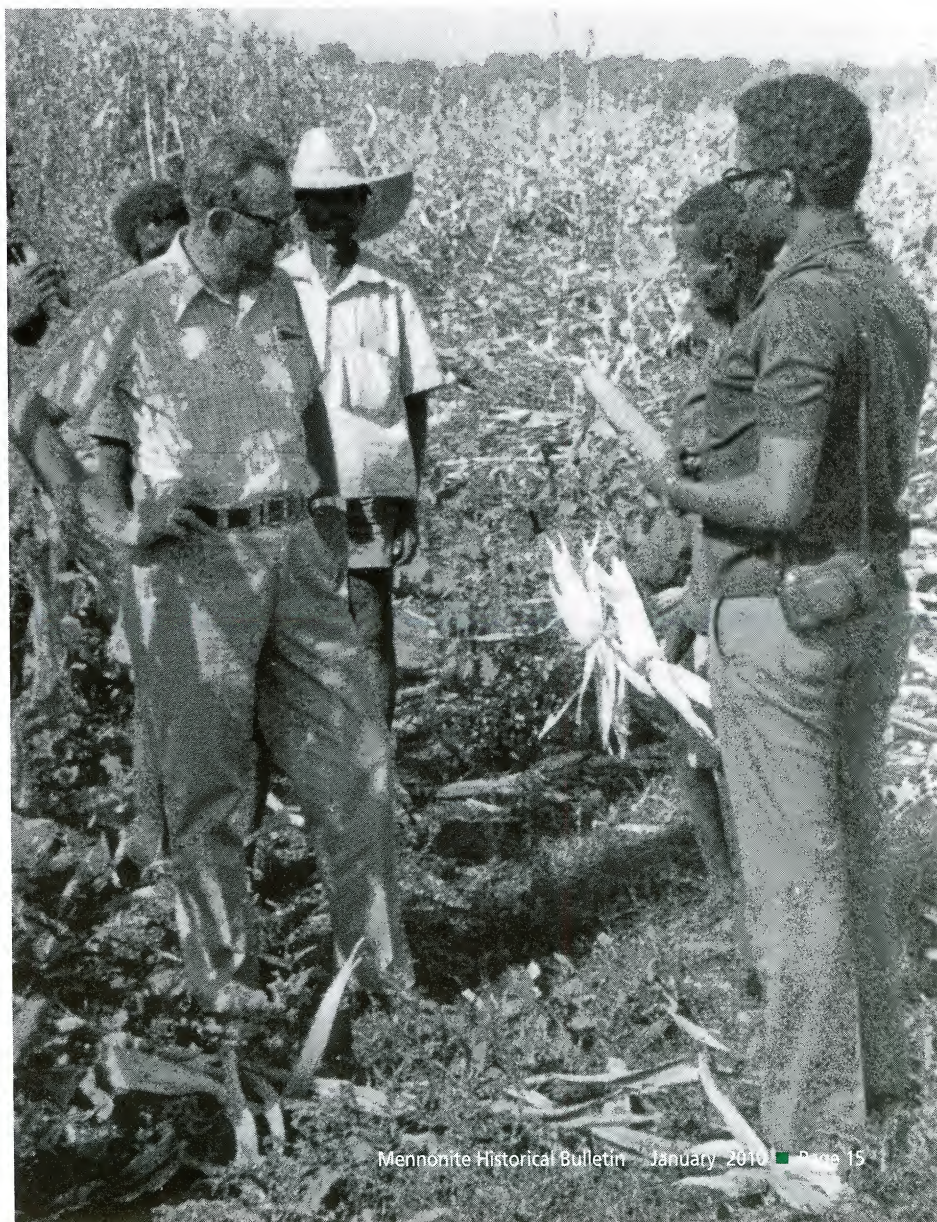
was forming. In 1958, when Negash was 17, the missionaries asked him to become a member, and Negash was baptized and joined the mission church.

Negash's pursuit of a new identity in opposition to his family accelerated after his conversion. Along with his decision to join MKC, he also decided to leave Bedeno and move to Nazareth to attend the Mennonite Bible academy. His decision to move to Nazareth was the final act of rebellion. He said:

Being young and inexperienced, I had found this new faith, so I challenged my parents. I wasn't humble about it. I deliberately ate meat and dairy products on days they were fasting—that made them very angry, that was their tradition. In retrospect ... I wish I had fasted because Paul also says that for the sake

*Meserete Kristos Chruch
development official
Assefa Ketema (left) and
P.T. Yoder of Eastern
Mennonite Missions
inspect a crop in 1977.*

Mennonite Church USA Archives-Goshen



Many women, like young people, were excluded from the social advantages of this patriarchal leadership, and therefore had nothing to lose in their conversions.

of Christ you go along with people as long as it doesn't affect your principle. We didn't do that. We challenged them and we insulted them. ... My excitement about my faith along with being young made me intolerant. This tendency is natural when you leave one system, you attack it and you ridicule it.

In response to Negash's approach, his father warned him against going to the Mennonite Bible academy in Nazareth and threatened him with violence when he refused to obey. As a result, Negash ran away without his father's approval and without saying goodbye. After four years at the academy, Negash finally reconciled with his parents and later realized there was nothing wrong with his parents' fasting and other practices. Fifty years later, Negash reflected, "I did things I think today are foolish. Had I done them differently, I think my parents would be in the [MKC] church even now."



Negash's conversion story represents the complex interplay with tradition, culture, spiritual freedom, and religious values as a young person works to solidify a new identity. The missionary message of a direct communion with God and the empowerment of studying biblical truths were new and refreshing and contrasted sharply to Negash's perfunctory experience in the Orthodox Church. His zealous commitment to living out his Mennonite teaching prompted him to look back at his Orthodox tradition as incomplete. He said, "The Orthodox Church was very threatened [by the new mission church] but they didn't have anything to offer; it was dead. Our church was dynamic; there was always something going on. It was a thrilling experience except for our lack of wisdom." Negash's story illustrates the clear contrasts that existed between the established Orthodox Church of his parents and grandparents and a new movement of young people.

Gender was also a significant factor one's

decision to convert. Along with the initial young converts, their mothers and sisters also became the MKC's newest members. There were tangible social advantages that came from one's leadership and standing in the Orthodox Church. However, many women, like young people, were excluded from the social advantages of this patriarchal leadership, and therefore had nothing to lose in their conversions.²¹ In many of the converts' faith stories, the sequence of conversions followed a similar pattern: after the initial conversion of the young male person, mothers and other female family members became the next converts, sometimes in the face of overt patriarchal oppression and censure.²² For other converts, family rejection was unified around the patriarch's wishes, but converts recognized that their mothers, sisters, and other younger siblings were more supportive and open to their Protestant ideas.²³

Beyene Demissie's story strongly exemplifies this pattern in his mother's courageous and adamant insistence on her MKC beliefs.²⁴ After Beyene's conversion, his mother and sister also secretly believed. Upon the discovery of his mother's and sister's beliefs, the town's Orthodox leaders informed his father and confronted the women, pressuring them to recant. These town elders, in conjunction with Beyene's father, threatened his mother with divorce, social ostracism, even death if she did not recant. Despite such ultimatums, Beyene's mother refused to deny her beliefs and, after giving the elders her final response, endured ostracism as a result. "If she was sick, if someone died, no one came," Beyene remembered. "She lived alone with her children." Not unlike the impetus for young male converts, women also found a life-giving and affirming place in the MKC faith community and were willing to give up their current social position for a new one in spite of severe censure.²⁵

In response to the significance of social position and status in a patriarchal cultural and religious environment, many MKC converts stated that their fathers either

remained strong in their Orthodox faith their whole lives or finally converted on their deathbeds. After converting mothers and other siblings, many MKC members struggled for years witnessing to recalcitrant fathers. Beyene said, "After 24 years of prayer and patience, my father converted and then died after conversion."²⁶ Girma Kelecha had a similar story of his father's deathbed conversion. Girma's mother and most of his siblings joined the MKC, but his father remained a strong Orthodox believer throughout his life. Nevertheless, Girma came to the bedside of his dying father and spoke to him again about his faith. "I talked to him even though he couldn't communicate with me as he ought," Girma said. "But I prayed and wept for him and he was saying 'Amen, amen, amen.' He never said any word after that and he passed away. I believe he is with the Lord."²⁷

Endnotes

- 1 In Ethiopian nomenclature, an individual takes his or her father's first name as a surname or last name so the surname is not a family name. Following that tradition, interviewees in this paper will be subsequently referred to by their first name to avoid confusion.
- 2 The following story comes from an interview with Getaneh Ayele and the author, May 8, 2008.
- 3 Subsequent references to Addis Ababa will be commonly called Addis.
- 4 Nathan Hege, *Beyond Our Prayers: Anabaptist Church Growth in Ethiopia, 1948-1998* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1998), 147-50.
- 5 This paper is based largely on oral interviews conducted over the span of three months in and around Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from May through July 2008. During these three months,

- nearly 35 interviewees shared their faith stories. The interviewees represented a mixture of ages, occupations, religious backgrounds, and places of origin. As a result of MKC's initial identity as a young male movement, most of the interviewees were males 40 to 60 years of age, with about one-third women and one-third people between the ages of 60 and 80. These interviewees also included a handful of currently Orthodox members who provide an interesting perspective on the Orthodox response to the MKC movement. The interviews were conducted primarily in Addis Ababa, Nazareth, and at the Meserete Kristos Bible College in Debre Zeit. The method of informant selection consisted of initial recommendations and suggestions by MKC leaders at the Bible college in Debre Zeit and then snowballed as individual interviewees suggested other MKC members and Orthodox members to interview. The interviews were conducted mainly in English; however, several of the interviews, particularly with older interviewees, required the help of a translator. In addition to offering academic research and analysis, this project and paper also reflect a commitment to listen attentively and sensitively to the converts and to see these stories as real, genuine, and transformative experiences instead of merely evidences of an analytical argument. These interviews by no means represent a complete or representative sampling of MKC attitudes and beliefs. Nevertheless, they reveal valuable insights in piecing together a larger understanding and context for the flood of conversions of early MKC members in the 1970s and early 1980s.
- 6 Guilia Bonacci, *The Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the State 1974-1991: Analysis of an Ambiguous Religious Policy*, Thesis (London: University of London, 2000), 6.
 - 7 Ibid., 22.

- 8 Ibid., 134-135.
- 9 Ibid., 150-154.
- 10 Ibid., 155.
- 11 Ibid., 164.
- 12 Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1991* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001), 193.
- 13 Eide, *Revolution and Revolution in Ethiopia*, 17.
- 14 Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, 195-196.
- 15 Ibid., 201.
- 16 Checole, "Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa," 231.
- 17 Ibid., 187.
- 18 The following story comes from an interview with Tadesse Negawo and the author, May 18, 2008.
- 19 The following story comes from an interview with Beyene Demissie and the author, April 24, 2008.
- 20 The following story comes from an interview with Negash Kebede and the author, May 8, 2008.
- 21 Tadesse Negawo.
- 22 Girma Kelecha, interview with author, June 16, 2008; Million Belete, interview with author, May 29, 2008; Haile Mariam, interview with author, April 24, 2008; Estifanos Gedlu; Beyene Demissie; Aster Debossie, interview with author [translated by Tiruwork Haile], May 18, 2008.
- 23 Maregie Habtru, interview with author, May 14, 2008.
- 24 The following story comes from an interview with Beyene Demissie and the author.
- 25 This comment does not imply that women necessarily had a significantly greater leadership role in MKC than in the Orthodox Church, but that, comparatively, there was a greater opportunity for women to play a more active role in the emerging, undefined MKC community than in the established Orthodox one.
- 26 Beyene Demissie.
- 27 Girma Kelecha.



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Volunteering a confession

Confession is good for the soul, according to the old adage. So allow me this opportunity to publicly admit that I goofed. Erred. Made a mistake. Screwed up. Fell down on the job. In doing so, I slighted some people who are extremely valuable to the Mennonite Church USA Historical Committee's mission.

In a gross oversight on my part, the Historical Committee's annual report in the last issue of *Mennonite Historical Bulletin* failed to include the names of the volunteers who have given us their time and talents. These are the people who compile our obituary databases, organize our photograph collections, type inventories of our archival collections, stuff envelopes, even edit the very words you are now reading. The Historical Committee would be much poorer without them.

So I want to give recognition to those frequently unsung but vitally important individuals who contribute so much to our offices in Goshen, Ind., and North Newton, Kan.:

Goshen – Mabel Brunk, Esther Cender, Don Garber, Martha Heath, Helen Hostetler, Thelma Martin, Carl Metzler, Doris Metzler, Nelda Nussbaum, Carol Oyer, Nathan Shenk, Susanna Stoltzfus.

North Newton – Helen Betrand, Lillian Galle, Rosemary Moyer, Mary Rempel, Esther Rinner, Esther Thieszen, Stan Voth.

Thank God for them. Because of the great volume of our work and the tightness of our budget, the men and women who are able and willing to volunteer their time are essential if the Historical Committee is going to adequately serve the church.

Speaking of volunteers, Martha Heath of Goshen has long been responsible for compiling the index for *Mennonite Historical Bulletin*.

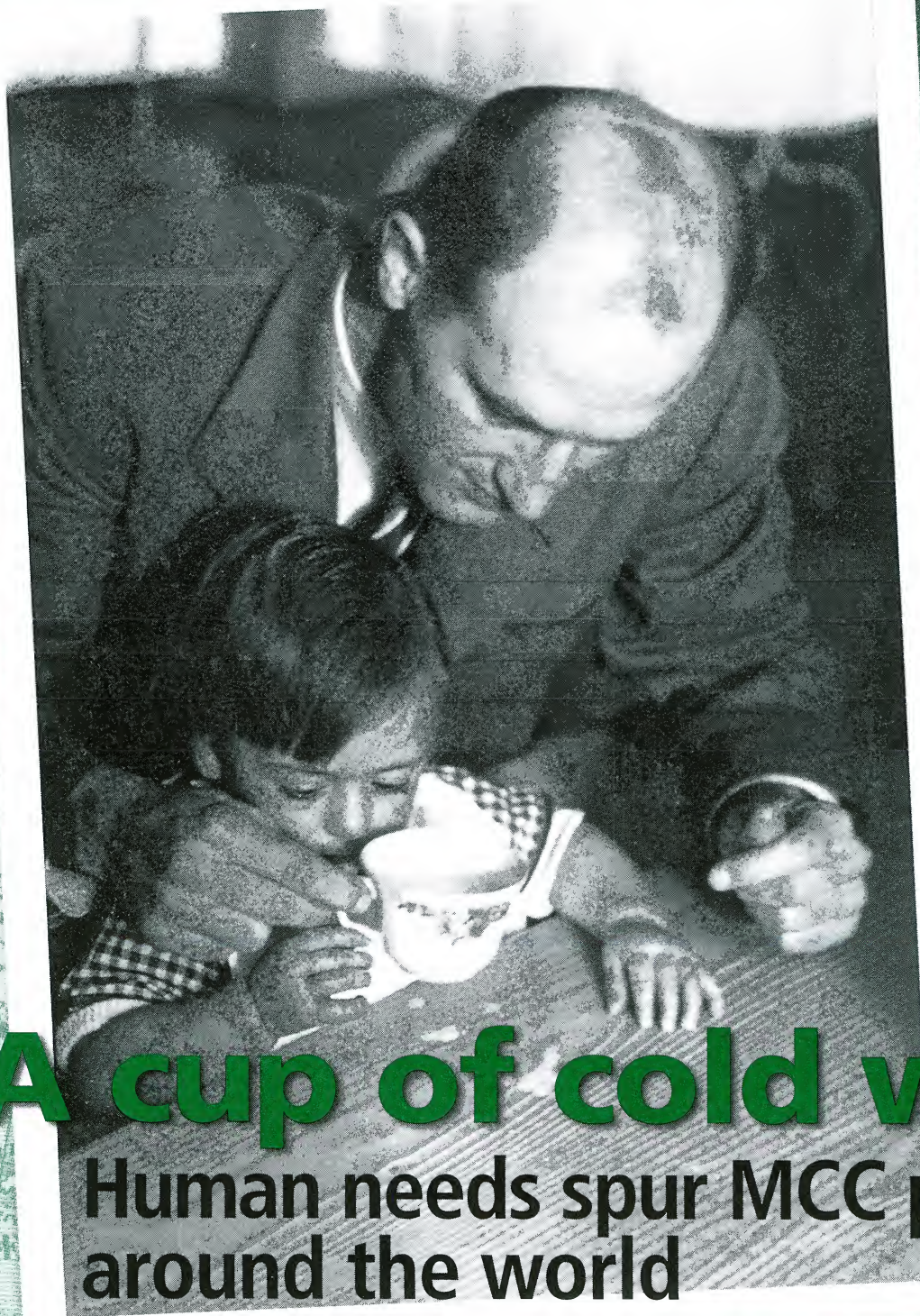


This issue showcases her work, listing all articles and photographs that have been in MHB over the past decade.

—*Rich Preheim*

Mennonite
Historical
Bulletin

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A cup of cold water

Human needs spur MCC programs
around the world



McFarland

New archivist hired to lead Goshen archives

Colleen McFarland of Eau Claire, Wis., will start June 1 as archivist at the Mennonite Church USA Historical Committee's archives in Goshen, Ind. She has been head of special collections and university archivist as well as an assistant professor at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire since 2006.

"Colleen brings an impressive set of credentials and experience," said Historical Committee director Rich Preheim. "They mesh very well with our priorities and needs right now. She is ideally suited to provide important leadership for the Historical Committee's archival program."

A self-described "lone arranger," McFarland has expertise in the management of small archives and has published several articles on the topic in archival journals. She has also been awarded several grants for digitizing archival and library materials.

McFarland earned a master's degree in library and information science from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and a master's degree in history from Cornell University, where she focused on early modern European history, including the Reformation. As an undergraduate, McFarland majored in history and German at the College of Wooster.

She succeeds Dennis Stoesz, who stepped down in September 2009 after 20 years as archivist.

Soviet Mennonite victims remembered with new Ukrainian monument

After a decade of planning, a monument now stands in Zaporizhia, Ukraine, to memorialize the 30,000 Mennonites who perished due to Soviet oppression during the 20th century. It was dedicated last fall in a ceremony attended by some 300 Ukrainians and international visitors.

"This monument bears enduring witness to the suffering of many thousands who cannot speak for themselves," said Peter Klassen of Fresno, Calif. He is co-chair of the International Mennonite Memorial Committee for the Former Soviet Union, which erected the monument in a city park. The location is in the heart of the former Mennonite village of Chortitza. Surrounding the park are buildings that Mennonites had erected for homes, schools, factories, stores and a church. It is the first in the former Soviet Union to remember all Soviet Mennonites.

The monument, made from granite from what had been a local Mennonite-owned quarry, consists of life-size silhouettes of a man, woman and two children. Inscribed on the base is from the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are those who mourn."

Among those participating in the dedicatory ceremony were area Mennonite church members, a Ukrainian choir and Zaporizhia city officials as well as North American Mennonite historians.

Ukrainian historian Fedor Turchenko spoke of the necessity of a "sacred duty of remembering the past" so such atrocities may be prevented from happening again. He also lauded Mennonite community life as "a model for the civil society that is much discussed these days and is proposed as a solution to many of Ukraine's problems." —*Mennonite Historian*

Lancaster County Mennonites celebrate their tricentennial

This year marks the 300th anniversary of the first Mennonite settlers in Lancaster County, Pa., which has since become one of the largest concentrations of Mennonites in the United States. The Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society and 1719 Hans Herr House and Museum in Willow Street have partnered to hold a variety of commemorative events throughout 2010.

Among them are several music programs; an exhibits of Pennsylvania Dutch art; tours of historic sites, including the route the first settlers took from Philadelphia to Lancaster County; and programs on the Pennsylvania Dutch language, Pennsylvania Dutch foods and cooking and Native American relations.

For more information, visit www.LancasterRoots300.org.



The Mennonite World Conference presidents not from Europe or North America

1. Million Belete – Ethiopia, installed 1972
2. Charles Christano – Indonesia, installed 1978
3. Raul Garcia – Argentina, installed 1990
4. Mesach Krisetya – Indonesia, installed 1997
5. Danisa Ndlovu – Zimbabwe, installed 2009

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by Rich Preheim



On the cover: Henry Wiens, the first director of MCC work in France, and a child in an MCC-supported feeding program.

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Six-Day War prompted MCC Egypt program

by Urbane Peachey



Above: David Newcomer, one of MCC's first workers in Egypt, supervises his English class at Ramses College for Girls in Cairo. Above right: An Egyptian student concentrates on her assignment.

Mennonite Church USA Archives-Goshen



The 1968 Six-Day War between Israel and its Arab neighbors starkly highlighted the volatility in the region as a result of the creation of the Jewish state two decades earlier. Mennonite Central Committee had been assisting Palestinian refugees in several locations in the region, but the scope of MCC's Middle East program shifted and expanded as a result of Israel's convincing victory in the Six-Day War.

After the war's conclusion, MCC sent Harry and Olga Martens to Jordan to direct emergency relief for the 400,000 Palestinians fleeing the West Bank. MCC also asked its Peace Section to provide the church perspective and understanding of the Middle East. Frank Epp, MCC Canada representative in Ottawa, was commissioned to make the Middle East a study priority. He proceeded to write the 1970 book *Whose Land Is Palestine?*, which would become a definitive work for two generations of North American Mennonites.

Epp made a "familiarization" tour in 1968, meeting more than 100 people in Geneva, Cairo, Beirut, Jordan's East and West Banks, Israel, Rome and the Swedish city of Uppsala. He recommended study tours to the region as a way of providing first-hand information; MCC subsequently led one in each of the next two years. Among other recommendations was for MCC to explore program possibilities in Egypt. So in the fall of 1969, MCC sent the Martenses back to the Middle East. The Egypt part of the assignment was described to them rather briefly and ambiguously in a letter from Vern Preheim, MCC director for Africa and the Middle East:

1. Make as many contacts as possible with church leaders and government officials to discuss MCC's interest in a service program in Egypt.
2. Specifically explore the possibilities of the following service involvement:

- a. Sending teachers to Egypt, secondary or primary or teacher education.
- b. Community development possibilities, for example, those that might be an outgrowth of irrigation possibilities as a result of the new Aswan dam.

Harry Martens prepared for his visit by attending the World Council of Churches-sponsored East-West Christian Conference in Cyprus, where he met the seven church delegates from Egypt. Martens then continued to Egypt where he met with the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Social Affairs. He also met with Coptic Orthodox Patriarch Kyrillos VI and Coptic Orthodox Bishop Samuel, head of the church's Public, Ecumenical and Social Services and chair of the Ecumenical Advisory Council for Church Services. After the Six-Day War, Egyptian Christian denominations offered emergency services to the more than 700,000 displaced people in the Suez Canal zone. The Egyptian government requested the churches to organize under one organization as a channel for their services, resulting in the formation of EACCS.

Martens gained credibility in Egypt by explaining the work of MCC in Jordan since 1950 and its emergency aid for Palestinians fleeing the West Bank in 1967. Following a meeting with EACCS members, Martens reported:

As we shared our heartfelt concerns, burdens, as well as our joys found in the Lord, we were inspired as rarely before. Many things were discussed concerning what our brotherly mission and Christian responsibility in the West should be to the suffering in the Middle East. As we were discussing the need for vocational training and material aid, the Bishop suddenly exclaimed loudly, "Above all else we need voices in the West who will take a stand and tell the full story of our plight and suffering, as to why and what it is doing to the inner soul of our disheartened people. In the Middle East our people need assurance and they want to know, to feel, to experience that you as brothers are by our side in our struggle in this time of testing." Martens proposed an MCC program in Egypt for four reasons:

1. MCC's compassionate and reconciling presence was needed because of deteriorating relations and political tensions in the region.
2. EACCS had invited MCC to support displaced Arabs.
3. U.S. officials in Cairo would welcome, at least privately, the efforts of non-governmental organizations like MCC. Catholic Relief Services was the only American-based U.S. agency working in Egypt in 1969.
4. MCC should support the churches amidst the adversity of the times.

"[Egyptian Christian churches] listened with great eagerness as we gave expression to our particular Mennonite faith," Martens reported, "including our emphasis on peace and our emphasis that our faith is to be lived, taking the Sermon on the Mount seriously, here and now. They crave fellowship and partnership with Christian brothers from the West. They earnestly seek our understanding and Christian love."

MCC accepted Martens' proposal and in 1969 shipped blankets valued at \$2,000 for the displaced Arabs now in the Sinai and Suez areas. A shipment of 18 knitting machines arrived in Egypt in 1971 for use in government training centers established to

'[Egyptian Christian churches] listened with great eagerness as we gave expression to our particular Mennonite faith,' Martens reported.

Rev. Abdel Melik Mihanny, director of the Coptic Evangelical Church schools (left), and MCC executive secretary William T. Snyder visit over tea. Mihanny invited the placement of the first MCC workers in Egypt.

Mennonite Church USA Archives-Goshen



help retrain refugees. They had come from harbor and fishing occupations, but there was limited opportunity for such work in the interior where they resettled. The centers provided training in carpentry, mechanics, electrical work and related crafts for men; the women received training in knitting, sewing, handicrafts and other domestic skills.

To further develop its program in the country, MCC appointed me as the organization's Egypt representative, working from the MCC Jordan office starting in the summer of 1970. I made several visits to Egypt each year until a resident MCC representative began work in the country in 1975. I was commissioned to nurture relationships and explore program possibilities. My first assignment, in February 1971, was to follow through on the work begun by Harry Martens in 1969. There were few private North Americans or Europeans in the country at the time, so I was among the first NGO representatives visiting Egypt after the 1967 war. In the hotel at breakfast on the first morning of my first visit, I overheard two Westerners asking themselves, "I wonder what the Mennonites are doing." So I introduced myself to the men, one who was from American Near East Relief and the other from American Friends Service Committee.

I tried to find the rationale for MCC work in the social, religious and political Egyptian context. In 1971 the country had a population of 30 million, of which 7 million were in Cairo. A sixth of the population was Christian, primarily Coptic Orthodox. Under President Gamal Abdel Nasser and Soviet influence, the economy and national policy were centralized, making it difficult for private agencies to find a niche. Nasser's death from a heart attack in September 1970 had considerable impact on the region. Many economic and national projects were suspended because of defense priorities and policy changes in the transition from Nasser to his successor, Anwar Sadat. I frequently heard disappointment that the United States had failed to provide economic aid to Egypt, which then accepted less esteemed Soviet aid. As late as 1971, there was an uneasy ceasefire between Egypt and Israel. There were still occasional military skirmishes in the Suez area, and security precautions against possible Israeli attacks in the interior were in force. Only a third of Cairo's street lights were lit at night for reasons of security and economy. Egyptians were cautious about being seen with foreigners. Tourists were permitted in Cairo, Luxor, Aswan and Alexandria, but a police permit was required for travel anywhere else in the country.

Coptic church origins

Egypt has been home to a sizable Christian population since the first century A.D. when, according to tradition, Saint Mark brought the gospel to the region shortly after Christ's ascension. The name Copt originally referred to Egyptians in general but now is only applied to native Egyptian Christians.

The Coptic Evangelical Church was born out of North American Presbyterian mission efforts in the 19th century. Originally called the Evangelical Synod of the Nile, it adopted its current name in 1952 to signify its connection to the larger church and to overcome the stigma of being attached to the American missionary enterprise. Most Presbyterian mission workers were eased out of the country by 1969.

MCC soon had opportunity to place long-term workers when Rev. Abdel Melik Mihanny, executive for the 12 schools of the Coptic Evangelical Church, in 1972 appealed to MCC for teachers. The first ones—Kathy Fisher, David and Peggy Newcomer, and Carolyn Yoder—arrived in the summer of 1973 to teach English at Ramses College. That experience stirred other schools' interest in having MCC. The Coptic Evangelical Hospital in Tanta soon requested nurses, and several American doctors served in short-term consulting roles.

Soon the Coptic Orthodox Church, the largest Christian body in Egypt, as well as the Coptic Evangelical Church, was submitting appeals for personnel and projects. The assignment of MCC teachers and nurses emerged as one of several long term priorities. But both groups naturally wondered about MCC's motives. Were we ready to work cooperatively? Would we be funding their projects or were we going to work independently? Did we intend to start a Mennonite church in Egypt? What kind of connection would we establish with the government? My approach was influenced by the model in West Bank and Jordan, where we were registered as NGOs with the government. We attempted the same in Egypt. Nevertheless, the government consistently challenged MCC's NGO status due to concerns that our eventual goal was proselytization. Yet after four decades, MCC is still serving in Egypt.

Urbane Peachey, of Akron, Pa., served as director of Mennonite Central Committee's program in Jordan and as MCC representative for Egypt and Lebanon from 1970 to 1975. He later was MCC Middle East secretary and executive secretary of MCC Peace Section.

Friends and enemies

The World War II origins of MCC work in France

by Gerlof Homan



MCC worker Edna Ramseyer (front, holding child) poses with her charges at the children's colony at La Rouviere, where she was the first director.

Mennonite Church USA Archives-Goshen

The first World War helped spawn the Communist Revolution and the subsequent famine that led to the creation of Mennonite Central Committee. Through the next two decades, MCC remained a tiny relief organization with a skeleton staff and limited budget. Then came a second global conflagration, propelling MCC into a large, well-respected agency for meeting human needs. One arena for that organizational maturation was France, where MCC workers came directly into contact with the devastating effects of armed conflict but also people deemed the enemy.

Upon Germany's invasion of Poland to start World War II in September 1939, MCC appointed longtime missionary Martin C. Lehman to Germany to oversee the distribution of food parcels by the German and Polish Red Cross organizations. In January 1940 MCC sent another missionary, Amos Swartzendruber, to Europe to assess relief needs. There he met Lester Hershey, Ernest Bennett and Edna

Ramseyer, workers with the Mennonite Relief Committee, a program of the Mennonite Church's Mennonite Board of Missions that was working with the American Friends Service Committee. On March 1, 1940, Bennett agreed to join MCC and to explore relief options until the arrival of a director of MCC relief projects. He returned to the United States in early 1941 and worked at MCC headquarters in Akron, Pa., until 1946.¹

Kansas native Ted Claassen went to Europe in spring 1941 to serve as director of MCC relief projects. He arrived in Genoa, Italy, at about the same time of the German attack on Western Europe.² This led to the occupation of the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Belgium and the partial occupation of France. According to the June 22, 1940, armistice with Germany, France was divided into two. The northern and western regions, about 60 percent of the country, were occupied and parts of it annexed by Germany, while the southeast remained under French jurisdiction. The French government moved to the city of Vichy, a health resort in the unoccupied zone. The regime, subsequently often referred to as Vichy France, was led by the aged World War I hero Marshall Philippe Pétain. Although Vichy

France retained some autonomy, it became in many ways a Nazi satellite. It was here that MCC along with AFSC organized relief programs. They had some freedom of action although the Germans were never far away.³ The MCC-AFSC collaboration was very smooth, and in the course of time it was sometimes difficult to distinguish whose project was whose, as MCC workers often served AFSC.

Vichy France faced acute needs. It was unable to feed its population because of a lack of agricultural resources, most of which were in the north; southern France had vineyards and produced little grain. The situation worsened after the Allied invasion of North Africa in November 1942, interrupting trade with the French colonies and prompting the government to introduce rationing.⁴ Furthermore, it had to house and feed many displaced people. At one time half a million people displaced by the Spanish Civil War had entered the country, 50,000 of whom stayed permanently. Others refugees came from Germany or other parts of Europe because of political reasons or Nazi racial policies. Many tried desperately

to emigrate to safer lands, but only few were able to do so. The Vichy regime housed refugees in various internment camps, where often wretched conditions prevailed. They were, according to AFSC, “places of crowded squalor, and a high death rate.” And estimated 2,000-3,000 people died in various French internment camps.⁵ AFSC organized branch offices in cities such as Lyon, Marseille and Toulouse, initiated children’s feeding programs and established “colonies,” or children’s convalescent homes. The organization also coordinated American relief efforts by Unitarians and Jews as well as by MCC.⁶

Claassen went to Marseille, where Bennett was based, but ultimately decided to locate in England. That left Bennett remaining temporarily in charge of the work in France.⁷ MCC subsequently sent Harold S. Bender to Europe in August 1940 to reassess relief needs. He met with Bennett, Ramseyer, Lyon mayor Édouard Herriot and the honorary Uruguayan consul, Samuel Ybargoyen.⁸ Herriot had been Lyon’s mayor for many years and one of the most influential politicians in France prior

*An MCC delegation visit
a feeding program in Lyon.*

Mennonite Church USA Archives-Goshen

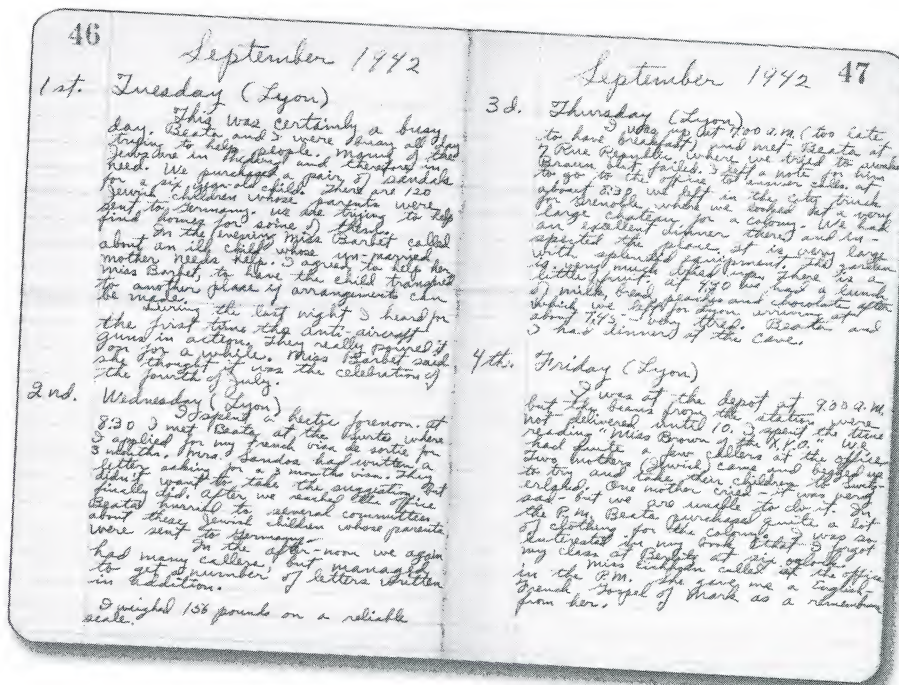


to the war. He first supported the Pétain regime but later turned against it. Ybargoyen was born in Uruguay and received part of his education at Springfield College in Massachusetts. For some time he served as the director of the Young Men's Christian Association in Turin, Italy, then in 1930 moved Lyon, where he became consul and also represented the International YMCA. Ybargoyen spoke fluent English and had previously assisted AFSC in its relief efforts in Spain. In Lyon, he and his wife, Yvonne Lambert, a member of an influential Lyon family, proved to be most helpful to MCC relief workers.⁹ Participants at the Lyon meeting agreed to begin a child-feeding program in the area and to continue to support a children's convalescent home in Marseille and feeding stations started earlier by Bennett in the Mediterranean coastal towns of Cerbère and Banyuls.¹⁰ Bender later met with the AFSC in Marseille to agree on cooperation between the two organizations.

Growing presence

Henry Wiens of Reedley, Calif., was appointed in September 1940 as the first director of MCC's relief work in France, a role he kept until July 1941.¹¹ Like most MCC workers in France, he did not know French. Joining Wiens was Jesse W. Hoover, who stayed until November 1941. Joseph N. Byler served as director from November 1941 until November 1942.¹² After Byler's departure, Henry Buller of Mountain Lake, Minn., assumed director responsibilities. Buller quickly learned the French language and came to appreciate the French and their culture. He was asked in 1942 to head the AFSC office in Montauban, one of its most important posts, where they could use his talents to the "fullest extent." Although tempted, Buller declined the offer.¹³

An unofficial MCC worker joined the office in late 1941 when Beatrice R. Rosenthal, a 21-year-old German Jewish refugee, was hired as secretary and interpreter. Her father, Richard, had been a respectable lawyer in Duisburg, Germany. The family, consisting of her parents, a



grandmother and brothers Gerd and Kurt, fled Nazi Germany in the 1930s and first settled in Antwerp, Belgium. Kurt left for the United States in 1936, and the rest of the family planned to follow. When Belgium was overrun by Germany in May 1940, the Rosenthals moved to Lyon in Vichy France, where Beatrice learned about Quaker and MCC relief. The MCC office hired her in December 1941 because of her language skills. But she brought more to the office, at least as far as Buller was concerned, as the two of them proceeded to start a romantic relationship. On November 11, 1942, the day on which Germany occupied Vichy France, Henry Buller and Beatrice Rosenthal were married at the Lyon City Hall, which was already occupied by German soldiers. Ybargoyen and MCC worker Lois Gunden were witnesses. A church wedding and Rosenthal's baptism, at First Mennonite Church of Upland, Calif., would have to wait until their arrival in the United States in 1944.

Other workers were soon added to the effort in France. MCC had been eager to persuade European Mennonites to participate in the relief efforts. Charlotte Gerber from Switzerland joined and served six months as director of the MCC-run convalescent children's homes near Marseille and at Canet Plage.¹⁴ Later that year Gunden, of Goshen, Ind., and Helen

Entries from the France journal of J.N. Byler, the second director of MCC's relief efforts in France.

Mennonite Church USA Archives-Goshen

AFSC coordinated American relief efforts by Unitarians and Jews as well as by MCC.

With 20 rooms and a dining room, Canet Plage could accommodate 65 children. They received food, clothing, medical attention and education.

Penner, a student from Bethel College in North Newton, Kan., arrived in France to work at Canet Plage.¹⁵ AFSC and MCC also hired local citizens and Spanish refugees to help them administer their programs. Those workers assumed leadership responsibilities after MCC's exit in late 1942.

The largest MCC relief effort was in and around Lyon, where food was distributed to underfed schoolchildren. Lyon was also MCC's base of operations, consisting of a small office with limited equipment and practically no heat. AFSC purchased most of the food MCC distributed, much of it brought in from Portugal, Switzerland, Eastern Europe and North Africa. Because of the British blockade and the spread of war, purchasing food abroad became increasingly more difficult.¹⁶ Also hampering relief efforts were U.S. government restrictions. For example, the U.S. government in 1942 prohibited the purchase of milk in Switzerland,¹⁷ correctly fearing that the Germans could profit from such imported food.

In and around Lyon, legumes, chick peas, lentils, lima beans, jams, rice, milk and vitamins were distributed in schools and nurseries, and by 1942 *Secours Mennonite aux enfants*, or Mennonite Help for the Children, had fed some 35,000 children.¹⁸ MCC helped select the schools and supervised food distribution. The recipients often expressed their appreciation in thank-you letters and drawings.¹⁹

In the small coastal communities of Banyuls, Cerbère and Collioure in southeastern France, Bennett in 1940 started feeding stations that were run by local personnel under MCC supervision. At Cerbère, 35-40 children selected by local authorities received daily milk, food and vitamins. Bennett declared that the canteen was of "immense help," and Wiens felt that it was "the best and most permanent opportunity for a Mennonite witness in France."²⁰ A few miles farther north in the Banyuls area, Spanish refugee Augustin Coma organized and administered MCC's efforts, twice a month distributing food packages to 400-500 Spanish refugees

and some French families. The packages consisted of rice, beans, peas, noodles, sugar and potatoes. Bender called it "one of the most satisfactory projects in our entire relief work program."²¹ MCC received special recognition during a June 1942 visit by Byler and Gunden to Banyuls, where they received huge bouquets of roses, lilies and carnations. The experience meant much to the MCC workers, who felt that though their efforts were limited "every little bit that we can do is greatly appreciated."²²

Creating colonies

Replicating a program they had operated in Spain during the civil war there, several relief organizations established 16 colonies, or convalescent homes, for refugee children languishing in French internment camps. AFSC ran 12 of them, and MCC assisted in selecting the children. Many were without parents and were undernourished.²³ They received care in the colonies for two months or more, then returned to their camps. Some children not living in camps were also accepted. MCC's first colony involvement was with La Rouvière, established in 1940 in Les Accates, about 10 miles east of Marseille. It was in a large building that might have been a hotel, had 11 rooms and could accommodate about 50 children. It initially took only Spanish children but later accepted others, including some German Jews.²⁴ Ramseyer was the first Mennonite to serve at the colony, arriving shortly after it opened. AFSC soon appointed her director.²⁵ The Mennonite Relief Committee and later MCC made financial contributions. MCC assumed full responsibility of the colony in August 1940, with Ramseyer continuing as director.

Although she was assisted by a staff of five adult Spanish refugees, Ramseyer's task was very arduous, and she often prayed for wisdom and insight. Many children had been traumatized by the loss of their families and were covered with lice and scabies.²⁶ A complicating factor was the language barrier, as most children were Spanish but Ramseyer spoke only some French. Furthermore, the group of children was constantly changing,

with new refugees coming while others were leaving. But Ramseyer grew very fond of her charges and one time uncontrollably wept when she heard rumors, later proven false, that the children might be sent back to Spain.²⁷ One child, Rogelio Llerandi, said “Miss Edna” was “amazingly knowledgeable and unassuming with a naturally pleasant disposition.”²⁸ His brother Julian counted his experience at La Rouvière as one of the happiest times of his youth.²⁹

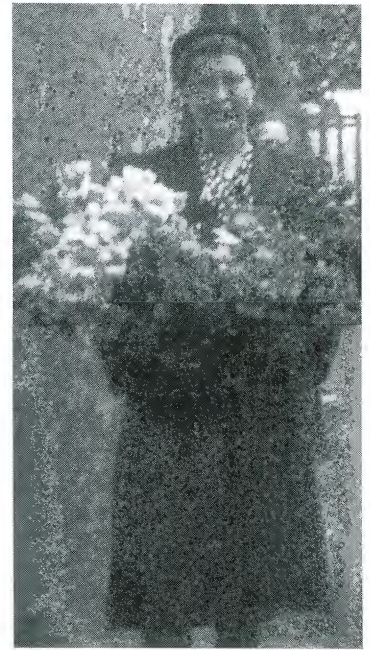
Ramseyer took the children on hikes, showed them how to grow vegetable gardens and taught them some English. Many children had received little or no education, but they were allowed to attend a nearby elementary school and were also taught at La Rouvière by Carmen Garcia or Doña Carmen, a former professor and dean of the University of Girona in northwestern Spain. Her husband had been executed during the civil war, and she and her 15-year-old daughter fled to France. Garcia, who called the children her “grande famille,”³⁰ served as La Rouvière’s co-director in 1941-42.

MCC returned La Rouvière to AFSC in 1941 when another director could not be found after the departure of Swiss Mennonite Gerber. At the same time, MCC rented a villa for a new colony in Canet Plage (now called Canet-en-Roussillon) on the Mediterranean coast. Gunden and Penner arrived in November 1941 to administer the colony. With 20 rooms and a dining room, Canet Plage could accommodate 65 children. They received food, clothing, some medical attention and some education. Twice a month Gunden and Penner, with assistance from AFSC staff, would select children, ranging in age from 3 months to 16 years, to be cared for at Canet Plage for two to three months. Many of the children came from the nearby internment camp at Rivesaltes. It housed some 9,000 people, most of whom were German Jews. About 3,000 of them were children, many whose parents had been deported. As in other French internment camps, the death rate was high especially among children.

Canet Plage had a certain routine: The

children were awakened at 7:30 each morning. The rising bell, according to Penner, would suddenly transform the villa into a “veritable squirming, wriggling, jabbering hive of human activity.”³¹ At 7:50 a.m., the staff would inspect the rooms. School began at 9 a.m., and lunch was served at noon. Early in the afternoon the children would go to the beach, and sometimes the older children were taken on a hike. School resumed later in the afternoon, and supper was served at 6 p.m. The children had to be in bed by 7:30 p.m.³²

In addition to their feeding program, MCC personnel received many requests from refugees who, desperate to emigrate, needed assistance in obtaining proper documents as well as money. It was MCC’s policy not to extend financial assistance, but sometimes workers found it difficult to refuse. In Marseille, Bennett and Ramseyer were approached by Ilse Harder Furstenberg, who claimed to be a Mennonite from the Prussian city of Danzig. She and her husband, Hans, who was Jewish, and son, Felix, had fled Danzig in 1936 because of Nazi anti-Semitic policies. The family first settled in Denmark, but in 1940 Hans left for Australia, hoping to be able to make enough money to bring his family. After the German invasion of Denmark in April 1940, Ilse and Felix fled to Belgium, hoping to be able to reach England. When that proved to be impossible, they went to Vichy France. The acquired tickets to go to Australia and a permit to travel to Lisbon, but for some reason Vichy would not let them go. The Furstenbergs were barely able to subsist, and with MCC approval, they were given some financial assistance. Vichy eventually allowed them to leave, but Ilse and Felix became stranded in Lisbon because they needed an American transit visa to travel to Australia. Most likely with MCC assistance, they were able to obtain the necessary document and also received \$2,000 to complete the journey to Australia, where they arrived in early 1941.³³



Lois Gunden was one of the MCC workers interned by the Nazis.

Mennonite Church USA Archives-Goshen

Organizers billed the ersatz school as 'education of the ignorant, by the ignorant, and for the ignorant.'

Bennett was also involved in assisting two British pilots who had escaped from a German prisoner-of-war camp. When the two men arrived in Marseille in August 1940, they were arrested and incarcerated in a local jail. They were again able to escape, and Bennett allowed them to stay one night in La Rouvière. They left the next day, and when questioned by the French police, none of the children revealed anything.³⁴

Nazi internment

The MCC staff in France considered Canet Plage enough of a success to explore possibly opening another colony in Callioure and a girls' colony in St. Maurice, near Lyon. But the German occupation of Vichy France in November 1942 ended all American relief efforts. The Canet Plage colony was closed by the Germans because it was located too close to the coast. Fortunately, arrangements had been made for the children to be moved to Lavercantière, a hamlet in south-central France. The home was maintained during the war and, after the liberation of France, was supported by MCC.³⁵ In addition, AFSC and MCC created a relief organization run by French and other European relief workers that received all the remaining AFSC and MCC funds and supplies to continue at least some relief work.³⁶

In January 1943, the Germans instructed all Americans to go to the ski resort Mont Doré in south-central France. From there they went to Baden-Baden, a German health resort, where they arrived on February 16.³⁷ The group of 165 included MCC workers Lois Gunden and Henry and Bea Buller and five Quakers, plus diplomats, journalists, spouses and children. They were housed in the large and comfortable Brenner Park Hotel where they were served by the hotel staff but guarded by the Gestapo.

Negotiations between Germany and the United States for an exchange of interned nationals began early in 1943 and lasted until February 1944. In the meantime, the internees had to entertain and amuse themselves and each other. At first, Gunden felt the internment provided her with a "real

rest cure" and a vacation.³⁸ The internees were well fed and, under guard, allowed to go outside for walks in the Black Forest and engage in sports. They organized parties, held worship services and established what they called Badheim University, which offered a great number of courses and lectures. Its organizers billed the ersatz school as "education of the ignorant, by the ignorant, and for the ignorant."

At first Buller felt that internment was a "great university of practicing patience and tolerance."³⁹ But boredom eventually set in. By August 1943, Gunden talked about the "humdrumness of this kind of living together."⁴⁰ She tried to find strength in her faith. God's ways were not always our ways and beyond human understanding, she wrote. She also tried to keep up her spirits by organizing parties, participating in many activities and making new friends.

After lengthy negotiations, Germany and the U.S. State Department were able to reach an agreement, exchanging 687 German nationals for 271 Americans held in Baden-Baden and Godesberg.⁴¹ The Baden-Baden internees left on February 19, 1944, and arrived in New York on March 15.⁴² After France's liberation, MCC, including the Bullers, returned to France to provide relief and care for children in five homes. One of those homes was in Château de Vair in Anetz sur Loire, was run by Bea's parents, Richard and Marie Rosenthal.⁴³

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Endnotes

- 1 Harold S. Bender report, "Minutes MCC Executive Committee," August 1940, MCC Collection, IX-1-5, Box 1, File 13, Mennonite Church USA Archives, Goshen, Ind. Hereafter cited as MCUSA Archives; Ernest Bennett report, "Minutes MCC Executive Committee," February 1, 1941, MCC Collection, IX-1-5, Box 1, File 15, MCUSA Archives; John Unruh, *In the Name of Christ: A History of the Mennonite Central Committee and Its Service, 1920-1951* (Scottsdale, Pa., Herald Press, 1952), pp. 45-47; Alice Resch Synnestvedt, *Over the Highest Mountains: A*

- Memoir of Unexpected Heroism in France during World War II* (Pasadena, Cal: International Productions, 2005), pp. 73-74. Synnestvedt refers to Bennett as a "charming American Mennonite" who was good at his work, had a pleasant disposition and would always say, "Keep smiling," instead of good bye.
- 2 Bennett report, "Minutes MCC Executive Committee," January 1941, MCC Collection, IX-1-5, Box 1, File 15, MCUSA Archives.
 - 3 There is extensive literature on Vichy France, including Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944* (New York: Knopf, 1972) and Julian Jackson, *France: The Dark Years, 1940-1944* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).
 - 4 Burritt M. Hiatt, et al., "Activities in France to 1942," AFSC Archives (no archival number), pp. 7-8. This report was written by various AFSC delegates during their internment in Baden-Baden, 1943-44.
 - 5 There is much literature on French internment camps: Synnestvedt, *Over the Highest Mountains*, passim; Howard Wriggins, *Picking up the Pieces from Portugal to Palestine: A Memoir* (Lanham: University Press of America Inc., 2004), p. 36; Donald Lowrie, *The Hunted Children* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1963), pp. 133ff; Donna F. Ryan, *The Holocaust and the Jews of Marseille: The Enforcement of Anti-Semitic Policies in Vichy France* (Urbana, Ill: University of Illinois Press, 1996), passim; Antony Beevor, *The Battle for Spain: The Spanish Civil war, 1936-1939* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), pp. 382-383, 410-419.
 - 6 Hiatt, et al, "Activities in France," p. 5; Anne L. Curtis, and Howard Kershner, eds., *The Quakers Take Stock* (New York: Island Workshop Press, 1944), pp. 105-109; Clarence Pickett, *For More Than Bread: An Autobiographical Account of Twenty Years of Work with the American Friends Service Committee* (Boston: Little Brown, 1953), pp. 179-183.
 - 7 Bennett report.
 - 8 Bender report. Ibid
 - 9 Some of the information on Ybargoyen came from Bea Buller, with whom the author had a very lengthy correspondence and many interviews. She also gave him a copy of a tape-recorded interview with James D. Yoder in 1993. Bea was the widow of Henry Buller. She also donated Henry's papers to the author. Hereafter cited as Buller Papers. Bea died on October 12, 2008. Most of the information on Ybargoyen came from Kautz Family YMCA Archives, MS 233, University of Minnesota Libraries, Archives and Special Collections, Minneapolis, Minn., and the Diplomatic Archives of the Uruguayan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Montevideo, Uruguay. In the latter, archival number 1756, is a letter dated March 30, 1939, by Howard E. Kershner, then head of AFSC relief in Spain, to the Uruguayan foreign minister, congratulating the latter for having such a person as Ybargoyen, a man of "character" and "capacity" in his service. Other sources on Ybargoyen were Howard E. Kershner, *Quaker Service in Modern War* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1950), p. 38; Bender and Henry Wiens reports, August 1940 and August 1941, "Minutes MCC Executive Committee," MCC Collection, IX-5-1, Box 1, Files 13 and 15, MCUSA Archives. Ybargoyen allowed MCC workers to use his automobile, introduced them to hundreds of people and, according to Wiens, rendered them "a host of other services too numerous to mention."
 - 10 Bender report.
 - 11 Ibid.
 - 12 Much biographical data on MCC delegates to France was kindly furnished by Frank Peachy of the library and archives at MCC headquarters at Akron, Pa., and some by MCUSA Archives. Some biographical information on Ramseyer came from Perry Bush, *Dancing with the Kobzar* (Telford, Pa.: Pandora Press, 2000), passim, and James C. Juhnke, *Creative Crusader: Edmund G. Kaufman and Mennonite Community* (North Newton, Kan.: Mennonite Press, 1994), pp. 244-245. There is some information on Byler in C.J. Dyck, ed., *Something for God: The Stories of Some Who Served with MCC: Mennonite Central Committee. Story 4: Biographies* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1981), pp. 131ff.
 - 13 Most of the information on Henry Buller came from Beatrice Buller. Buller was never drafted but allowed to go to France in 1941 and again in 1944-46.
 - 14 Much of the information on Gerber came from her brother Eduard Gerber, Bern, Switzerland; Fritz Gerber to Bender, 5-26-41, Bender Papers, HM 1-278, Box 17, File 1, MCUSA Archives.
 - 15 MCC library and archives.
 - 16 Bennett report.
 - 17 Curtis and Kershner, *Quakers Take Stock*, pp. 108
 - 18 Wiens report.
 - 19 In the Buller Papers is a letter of April 20, 1942, signed by 343 students who expressed appreciation over the soup they had received in the preceding months but also sadness over the discontinuation of the feeding program.
 - 20 Bennett report and Wiens report.
 - 21 Bender report, August 1940; Byler report, December 29, 1942, "Minutes MCC Executive Committee," MCC Collection, Box 1, File 17, MCUSA Archives; Ibid.
 - 22 Lois Gunden Papers, HM 1-926, Box 1, File 10, MCUSA Archives; Ibid. There is much detailed data on the Cerbère and Banyuls feeding stations in "MCC Europe and North Africa," MCC Collection, IX-19, Box 2, Files 34-36, MCUSA Archives.
 - 23 "MCC Europe and North Africa," MCC Collection, Box 2, File 37, MCUSA Archives.
 - 24 "MCC Europe and North Africa," MCC Collection, Box 2, File 57, MCUSA Archives. There were three other AFSC colonies in and near Marseilles: Les Caillols, Saint-Jerôme and Saint Rémy.
 - 25 One of the best sources on MCC's involvement with La Rouvière is Ramseyer's Diary, MS 500, Mennonite Library and Archives, North Newton, Kan. Hereafter referred to as MLA.
 - 26 Ibid.
 - 27 Ibid., p. 196.
 - 28 Julian Llerandi e-mail to author, April 4, 2009; Corsino Fernandez and Julian Llerandi, eds, *We Came Alone*, (Unpublished manuscript, 2006), p. 83.
 - 29 Ibid., p. 52.
 - 30 Ibid., passim.
 - 31 Helen Penner report, "MCC Europe and North Africa," November 1941, MCC Collection, IX-19, Box 1, File 14, MCUSA Archives; Ibid.
 - 32 Gunden Papers, HM 1-926, Box 1, Files 10 and 14, MCUSA Archives; Ibid.
 - 33 Correspondence regarding the Furstenberg case is in "MCC Europe and North Africa," Box 1, Files 3 and 4, and in Box 2, File 28, MCUSA Archives; National Archives of Australia, Series Accession Numbers 2002/05476255 and A435/1. Most likely the Furstenbergs were originally German Jews, some of whom moved to Poland and later to Danzig. There was a fairly large Jewish community in Danzig in the 1920s, most of whom survived the Holocaust by emigrating abroad. It is possible that these Furstenbergs were related to Arnold Fürstenberg, a prominent Danzig Jewish leader who survived the holocaust because of his marriage to a Christian. There was no

Mennonite community in Australia in 1940-41. The Furstenbergs settled in the Melbourne suburb of Hawthorn. Hans Furstenberg died in 1949 and Ilse in 1981. So far the author has not been able to learn more about Felix Furstenberg's life in Australia. It is possible that he returned to Germany or moved to Canada or the United States. Jeannette Tsoulos of the Australian Jewish Society, Sydney, to author, January 27, 2009. One can learn more about the Danzig Jewish community in: Samuel Echt, *Die Geschichte der Juden in Danzig* (Leer: Gerhard Rantenberg, 1972) and Erwin Lichtenstein, *Die Juden der Freien Stadt Danzig unter der Herrschaft des Nationalsozialismus* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1973). So far no evidence has been uncovered to show the Furstenbergs or Ilse's parents were members of the Danzig Mennonite congregation, although they claimed to be of Mennonite heritage.

34 Fernandez and Llerandi, p. 29; Ramseyer, Diary, p. 217

35 Buller to Gunden, April 22, 1942, Byler to Gunden, April 23, 1942, and Gunden to Byler, June 17, 1942, "MCC Europe and North Africa," MCC Collection, IX-9, Box 1, File 16, MCUSA Archives; Byler report, December 1942, "Minutes MCC Executive Committee," MCC

Collection, IX-5-1, Box 1, File 17, MCUSA Archives; Gunden to all, September 21 and 29, October 16-23, 1942, Gunden Papers, HM 1-926, Box 1, File 10, MCUSA Archives; "MCC Europe and North Africa," Box 1, Files 64-66, and Box 2, Files 39 and 61-64 contain much data on the MCC colony in Laverantière. After the war MCC established children's homes in Vair, Vescours, Weiler and Nancy. The latter was later moved to Valdoie, a Belfort suburb.

36 Hiatt, "American Friends Service Committee," p. 4; Buller papers. Two new children's homes were started during this time. Michel Paret, "L'Action sociale Mennonite en France au XX Siècle: Approches Diachronique et Analytique" (Thesis, École des Hautes Études, Sorbonne, 1997), p. 139.

37 Gunden to mother, December 4, 1943, Gunden Papers, HM 1-926, Box 1, File 19. MCUSA Archives.

38 Gunden to mother, March 5, 1943. Gunden Papers. HM 1-926, Box 1, File 19. There is much information on the internment in Gunden's correspondence in the Gunden Papers, HM 1-926, Box 1, File 19; Gunden to O.O. Miller, July 14, 1943, Gunden Papers, Box 1, File 22. See also Gunden, *At Brenner Park Hotel* (Akron, Pa.: Mennonite Central Committee, 1945); Buller, *The Nazis*

Interned Me (Akron, Pa.: Mennonite Central Committee, 1944), and Robert F. Hinshaw, *Living with Nature's Extremes: The Life of Gilbert Fowler White* (Boulder, Colo.: Johnson Books, 2006), pp. 63-68. During her internment, Bea Buller was questioned once by the Gestapo but nothing happened.

39 Buller, *Nazis*, p. 8.

40 Gunden to mother, August 16, 1943, Gunden Papers, HM 1-926, Box 1, File 19, MCUSA Archives.

41 U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers 1942. Vol. 1* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1960), pp. 285-377; *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers 1943. Vol. 1* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1963), pp. 104-115; *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers 1944. Vol. 3* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1965): pp. 785-799.

42 Gunden Report, n.d., Gunden Papers, HM 1-926, Box 1, Folder 1, MCUSA Archives. There is also a video on the Internet showing the debarkation of the Baden-Baden internees in New York.

43 Gerard Rosenthal to author, November 13, 2008. MCC's post-World War II work in France is discussed in some detail in Paret, "L'Action Sociale," pp. 141ff.

ANNUAL REPORT

The last fiscal year (February 1, 2009–January 31, 2010) for the Mennonite Church USA Historical Committee was dominated by matters both foreign and domestic.

One major project was responding to a request from the Mennonitische Forschungsstelle, the Mennonite archives at the Weierhof in Germany, for the record books of Danzig Mennonite Church. The congregation, started in the mid-16th century in the Prussian city of Danzig, ceased to exist when World War II forced the Mennonite population to flee, most of them to Germany. The congregational record books, with the earliest entries dated the late 16th century, were discovered in the burned-out church by North American Mennonite relief workers shortly after the war. They brought the books back to the United States, where they were deposited in Historical Committee's North Newton, Kan., archives. The books were presented to

the Germans in a June ceremony in Berlin. Among those in attendance were several people who had been part of Danzig Mennonite Church.

But before the Historical Committee returned the books to Europe, we were able to digitize them, thanks to the generosity of a number of supporters. The digitized images of the record books are in the process of being posted on our website so they will be available to scholars, genealogists and other researchers with an Internet connection anywhere in the world.

The North Newton Archives and the Historical Committee are extremely thankful to have had the opportunity over the past 60 years to help preserve these important documents of our heritage as a distinct people of faith.

Meanwhile at home, the Goshen Archives bid farewell to archivist Dennis Stoesz, who stepped down in September after 20 of dedicated service. His departure

left a sizable hole in the archives' day-to-day operations, but staff and volunteers capably filled in to keep the archives functioning at a reasonable level for the past nine months. A new archivist, Colleen McFarland, will begin work on June 1 (see page 2).

Financially, FYE 2010 was a successful year, particularly in the area of contributions. Boosted by a 24 percent increase in the number of donors over last

year and nearly a 40 percent jump in the number giving at the club levels (\$250 or more), we received nearly \$55,000, which was \$13,000 more than FYE 2009. The Historical Committee is most grateful and gratified for these monetary expressions of support for our work and our history. Overall, income was only \$2,000 behind expenses for the year, largely due to a decline in *Mennonite Historical Bulletin* subscriptions.

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Historical amnesia

In light of his recent condemnation of congregations that preach and promote “social justice,” there is much from across the ideological spectrum that could be said about controversial commentator Glenn Beck. But one thing is quite apparent: He has historical amnesia.

In several March broadcasts and on his website, Beck, a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, denounced “social justice” (which he doesn’t clearly define but perhaps is akin to anti-capitalism) as a perversion of the gospel and comparable to communism and fascism. Yet the historical record, including the Bible, clearly shows that addressing injustices and inequality is central to Christianity: The Old Testament concept of jubilee. Christ’s instruction to the rich young ruler to sell all he has and give the proceeds to the poor. The fledgling church in Acts holding everything in common and distributing to those in need.

There is more to social justice than dollars and cents. The Christian church has been at the fore of the anti-slavery, temperance, civil rights

and anti-abortion movements. Even Beck’s own church can’t be excluded. “[C]are of the poor and needy” is a “basic” responsibility of LDS members, according to the church’s website. Surely such expressions of religious belief fall into the category of social justice.

The criticisms of Beck’s historical amnesia also apply to Mennonite Church USA. As evidence, consider Conrad Kanagy’s 2007 book *Road Signs for the Journey*, which reports that only 65 percent of denominational members would declare themselves conscientious objectors and choose alternative service should they face military conscription, compared to 81 percent 35 years ago. Ignoring the legacy of Dirk Willems, World War I conscientious objectors (who didn’t



have the option of alternative service) and so many others place our church’s faith in peril. Like Beck, we need to realize that our future can be found in our past. —*Rich Preheim*

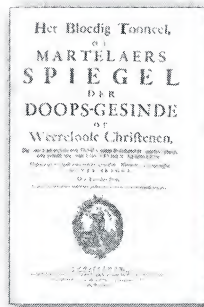


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Planting
Gospel seeds
in war-ravaged
Vietnam

Fertile fields



Conference marks *Martyrs Mirror* anniversary

Church of the Brethren-affiliated Elizabethtown (Pa.) College threw a birthday party in June, not to celebrate years of life but to commemorate death. The occasion was the 350th anniversary of the *Martyrs Mirror*, Thieleman van Braght's chronicle of those who gave their lives for their faith, most of them Anabaptist. Despite its age, the book is still extremely relevant, according to one historian.

"The *Martyrs Mirror* is the correct medicine for 21st-century Christians, and especially for Mennonites," said James Lowry of Hagerstown, Md., one of the speakers at the June 8-10 conference, which was sponsored by Elizabethtown's Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies. More than 60 people attended the event.

First published in 1660, the *Martyrs Mirror* was compiled by van Braght, a Dutch Mennonite, to spur revival in the church. The 1685 edition added Jan Luyken's well-known illustrations to accompany the text. Since then it has been repeatedly reprinted.

In the 1740s, Pennsylvania Mennonites, facing mandatory military service, commissioned the translation of the *Martyrs Mirror* into German and its subsequent publication at Ephrata, Pa. At 1,500 pages, it was the largest book printed in colonial America. A pattern emerged of American Mennonites reprinting the *Martyrs Mirror* at times when their peace stance was threatened, said another speaker, Julia Spicher Kasdorf, author and professor of writing at Penn State. "Rather than attempt to change public policy, they would publish the *Martyrs Mirror*," she said.

Ironically, the *Martyrs Mirror*

was once used for violent and not peaceful reasons. Continental soldiers during the American Revolution used pages from unsold copies for cartridges for their muskets.

John D. Roth, history professor at Goshen (Ind.) College and Mennonite Historical Society president, announced at the conference that MHS is planning a conference on the *Martyrs Mirror* for 2012 and is discussing the possibility of updating the book with accounts since the 17th century. "The suffering church has continued in many parts of the world, including in the Anabaptist/Mennonite world," Roth said.

— *Mennonite Weekly Review*

Historical trends in book publishing identified

Books have long been a common medium for promoting understandings and values in children. Kathi Meyer Reimer, education professor at Goshen (Ind.) College, recently examined the children's books that have been published by Herald Press over the past 60 years and identified several eras of types of literature in that span.

The first era, starting in the 1950s, featured what Reimer called "modern-day *Martyrs Mirror*" books, with stories about real people having to make choices and do heroic things because of their faith. Examples of such books include *Henry's Red Sea* (published in 1955) by Barbara Claassen Smucker and *Coals of Fire* (1954) by Elizabeth Hershberger Bauman. "Most [books] are plot driven, with the characters living out the teachable characteristics Mennonites would like to pass on to the next generation," Reimer said.

That era was followed in the late 1960s and early '70s by historical and biographical fiction. Louise Vernon's

Night Preacher (1969), about Menno Simons, and Geraldine Gross Harder's *When Apples are Ripe* (1971), about Clayton Kratz, and other such books focus more on the people than the books of the previous era, Reimer said. "Although fictionalized, these stories value staying close to primary sources and presenting a narrative that builds on available historical data," she said.

Starting in the mid-1970s, books were becoming more family and issue oriented. Marjorie Waybill wrote *Chinese Eyes* (1974), a picture book on her family's adoption of a Korean daughter. Dorothy Hamilton's books did not specifically refer to Anabaptism but brought resolution to conflict in a manner consistent with Anabaptist beliefs. During this time, Marian Hostetler also wrote issue-based novels but with an international perspective.

While the earlier eras' titles were usually chapter books for readers ages 8 to 13, the most recent wave of picture books written for younger children. They are also about issues but not about interpersonal conflicts. For instance, *Praying with Our Feet* (2005) by Lisa Weaver is about a girl joining her congregation in a peace march. Judy Roth's *Cups Held Out* (2006) follows a young girl's trip to Mexico, where she encounters beggars and has to determine her response.

"Themes that have been important for Anabaptists to pass on to children, as reflected in Herald Press, have shifted over the years, from telling Anabaptist history ... to dealing with personal issues and issues of global justice," Reimer said. "But the fact that writing and books continue to be venues for sharing Anabaptism with children remains the same." — *Center for Mennonite Writing Journal*



Oldest Mennonite Church USA-affiliated high schools

1. Freeman (S.D.) Academy – 1903
2. Lancaster (Pa.) Mennonite School – 1942
3. Iowa Mennonite School, Kalona, Iowa – 1945
4. Belleville (Pa.) Mennonite School – 1945
5. Western Mennonite School, Salem, Ore. – 1945

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On the cover: A Vietnamese farmer at work, circa 1965. Mennonite Church USA Archives-Goshen

Correction: The Six-Day War between Israel and its Arab neighbors occurred in 1967, not 1968 as noted in the April issue of *Mennonite Historical Bulletin*.

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‘The love of God constrains us’

The beginnings of Mennonite mission work in Vietnam

by Luke Martin

Arlene Stauffer (right) and a Vietnamese friend in Bible study. Stauffer and her husband, James, were Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities' first missionaries in Vietnam, arriving in 1957.

Credit: Eastern Mennonite Missions

On May 30, 1957, the French freighter *S.S. Sindh* waited in the Saigon River until high tide so it could navigate above the rocky shelf to dock on the Saigon waterfront. Onboard were Americans Arlene and James Stauffer, waiting to disembark into the heat and humidity and into their new life as the first Mennonite missionaries in Vietnam. Their voyage across the Pacific Ocean, with stops in Manila and Hong Kong, took two months. But for the Stauffers' sending organization, Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities (commonly called Eastern Mennonite Missions today), the journey to Vietnam had started several years before.

While both the missionaries and their mission board were pioneers, they were not the first Mennonites in the country. That distinction belonged to Mennonite Central Committee, which arrived three years earlier to respond to refugee needs in the aftermath of the French Indochina War. But MCC's Vietnam presence directly led to Eastern Board's. A pattern had earlier emerged where MCC work in a country would be assumed after a few years by a North American Mennonite mission agency for long-term outreach. That had already been the case in Puerto Rico, Ethiopia and Taiwan. Furthermore, the MCC executive secretary was Orie O. Miller, who was also board secretary for Eastern Board, the mission agency of Lancaster Conference. Miller's knowledge from one organization was frequently helpful in his work for the other. That was enhanced by the fact that he lived in Lancaster County, Pa., near the headquarters of MCC in Akron and of Eastern Board in Salunga.

The post-World War II era saw an increase in Mennonite mission and service, and Eastern Board was looking for new opportunities. In the spring of 1955, Miller proposed two new mission fields for Eastern Board: Vietnam and the Indonesian island of Sumatra. At its bimonthly meeting on May 11, 1955, the organization's board approved starting a new program on Sumatra by the end of 1956. But Miller, even while preparing for Sumatra, kept Vietnam in mind. In fact, he had dreams of a multi-agency Mennonite venture in the country. Meanwhile, Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, the Elkhart, Ind.-based mission agency of the broader Mennonite Church, was also looking to expand

"Orie O. Miller reported on the open door and challenging opportunity in Viet Nam where less than 100 missionaries serve over twenty million people."

its ministries. "[W]hy not consider Vietnam?" Miller suggested to his good friend J.D. Miller, MBM's general secretary. "In total Southeast area strategy ... Vietnam should have the immediate preference and should also prove more promptly fruitful in church building results,"

Miller wrote to Graber. "As intimated, I believe that our Eastern Board would be open to entry into Vietnam too and also to a strategy for association with Elkhart in such entry, and I feel also that MCC is already preparing a good approach thereto and as has been MCC's role and opportunity in other fields in the past."

In another letter to Graber, Miller cited a survey estimating that Vietnam could absorb as many as 800 missionaries. "As one considers this field it strikes one as strategic as Japan [was] right after World War II and after which four Mennonite boards entered Japan and located without interference with each other and in good comity relationship," Miller wrote.

On January 4, 1956, he again suggested Vietnam as an Eastern Board mission field, and this time it was approved. Just eight months after approving work in Sumatra, the board changed course. "Orie O. Miller reported on the open door and challenging opportunity in Viet Nam where less than 100 missionaries serve over twenty million people and where there is prospect of a good response," according to the meeting minutes. "In light of previous board action entry into Sumatra (at which time the door was not open in Viet Nam) the board authorized entry into Viet Nam first instead of Sumatra if the way continues to be clear in that direction." The search then started for the first workers.

James Stauffer, pastor at Sonnenberg Mennonite Church at Kidron, Ohio, and his wife, Arlene, were approached. James, son of Eastern Mennonite College president John L. Stauffer, graduated from EMC in 1953 and the next year married fellow student Arlene, a native of Souderton, Pa. She had felt a call to mission work since she was 14, while he had earlier considered an assignment with Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions. The Stauffers accepted Eastern Board's invitation in the spring of 1956 and were formally appointed on September 11 of that year.

"We thank the Lord that one little country ... has withstood the siege of communism and today is a free democratic nation open to the Gospel," James wrote in *Missionary Messenger*, Eastern Board's monthly magazine. But their real reason for going to Vietnam was "not simply to defend Christianity against communism," he wrote, but because "the love of Christ constrains us."

The speed with which Eastern Board turned its focus from Indonesia surprised MBM. A week after the Stauffers' appointment, Graber sent Miller a letter to express MBM's reservations about a joint program. "[Vietnam] has been in our planning for several years," Graber told his friend. "When we read the Eastern Board minute laying down plans for a fairly extensive mission program in Sumatra we assumed that you would not be entering still another country in eastern Asia so soon and thus our interest in possibilities in a country like Viet Nam continued to develop." He continued:

Our Executive Committee feels strongly that we dare not give the impression to the Church that Elkhart and Lancaster are competing with each other, nor should the impression be created that we duplicate each other in any country. For this reason, in view of the minute passed by the Eastern Board a few days previously, our Executive Committee felt they should not adopt my recommendation and record a minute looking forward toward a [joint] approach in Viet Nam. They feel that representatives of both our Boards should meet to discuss fully together this specific question of mission work in Viet Nam and also explore any other and larger questions of mutual coordination of our programs.

MBM in November officially decided to discontinue its Vietnam explorations. But Miller's persistence continued, and he did not immediately abandon his vision of working with other agencies in the country.

“What other Mennonite or Brethren in Christ missions interest there would be in Indo China area therefore remains to develop,” he wrote Willard Krabill, an MCC doctor in Vietnam. “As an MCC, we will want to continue closely connected with service needs and interests in Indo China area MCC concept-wise and indefinitely and will be appreciative of any suggestions and counsel from our workers as to further outreach in the area at any time you would have it to give.” But no other potential partnerships emerged, and Eastern Board proceeded alone in Vietnam mission work.

The Stauffers spent their first several months in Vietnam in the MCC house in a northern Saigon suburb, hosted by Delbert Wiens, MCC’s Vietnam representative, and material aid worker Carl Hurst. In James Stauffer’s first letter to his parents, written June 1, 1957, he described the building as a new two-bedroom house with dining and living rooms, all with red and white ceramic tile floors and high ceilings with windows of ventilated shutters and steel bars. He also said that Wiens and Hurst had made the Stauffers feel at home. The previous night they had had a “good old fashioned hymn-sing,” and they were planning to attend Sunday’s service at the American Community Church, a congregation for local expatriates.

Within a week after their arrival, Wiens took the Stauffers to meet D.I. Jeffrey and Jack Revelle, the latter in the process of succeeding the former as field administrator for the Christian and Missionary

Mennonites and CMA

When Lancaster Conference’s mission board sent the first Mennonite missionaries to Vietnam in 1957, they were following a route paved with the help of former sisters and brothers in the faith.

The Christian and Missionary Alliance, the first Protestant denomination to evangelize Vietnam, was founded in 1887 by Presbyterian minister A.B. Simpson in New York. The new movement soon attracted Mennonite support. In 1884, Amelia Hess, originally from Landis Valley Mennonite Church near Lancaster, Pa., but a member of the Church of God, experienced a miraculous healing after years of various debilitating ailments. Contact was made with Simpson, who taught divine healing and made a number of visits to Lancaster County. Controversy ensued, resulting in a number of Landis Valley members leaving in 1892 and forming a new congregation identified with the CMA. Among those departing were Amelia’s brother Isaac and his wife, Mazie. They plus four other relatives felt called to evangelism and joined the CMA’s fledgling mission field in south China between 1894 and 1898.

Some CMA missionaries wanted to expand their outreach into neighboring Vietnam but had repeatedly run into roadblocks until 1911 when they were allowed to enter. A mission station was established that fall in Danang in central Vietnam. In 1915, Isaac Hess was appointed the first superintendent of CMA’s Vietnam. But with World War I raging in Europe, he resigned the next year because his last name spurred accusations of being a German sympathizer in Vietnam, which was a French colony. Hess returned to China, where he died in 1923.

– from *All the Way to China* by Martha L. Charles Pepper



An Evangelical Church of Vietnam church just outside Saigon. The ECVN was the primary Protestant denomination in the country when Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities began its Vietnam program. Mennonite Church USA Archives-Goshen



Christian and Missionary Alliance mission worker D.I. Jeffrey distributes bread and Mennonite Central Committee canned meat to children in a Saigon suburb as part of a 1962 Christmas celebration. Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities worked closely with the CMA, which was the first Protestant mission agency in Vietnam.

Mennonite Church USA Archives-Goshen



James Stauffer teaches English, one of the ministries for the first Mennonite missionaries to Vietnam. Credit: Eastern Mennonite Missions

Alliance, the first Protestant denomination to enter Vietnam. The CMA had been working in neighboring China when the British and Foreign Bible Society, which had been selling Scriptures in the Vietnamese city of Danang, invited the CMA to Vietnam in 1911. Until then, the only expression of Christianity in the country was Catholicism, which first arrived in the early 16th century. The CMA found fertile ground, and the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (ECVN) was founded in 1927. The CMA remained the only Western Protestant organization in Vietnam until 1929, when the Seventh-Day Adventists began its missionary activity in the country, which was still fairly small at mid-century.

In their meeting with Jeffrey and Revelle, the Stauffers mentioned establishing schools as a potential project for the Mennonites, which Miller had recommended. The CMA missionaries encouraged the newcomers to consider starting a Christian high school. Jeffrey and Revelle also expressed concern that the Mennonites would establish another indigenous church, attracting people away from the 20,000-member ECVN. That was not their goal, the Stauffers reassured their CMA colleagues. "I don't think we'll have any difficulty working for them," James Stauffer reported to Miller and his Eastern Board assistant, Paul N. Kraybill. (The Stauffers' optimism wasn't necessarily shared by the MCC workers. Wiens was appalled with the inability of the CMA and the ECVN to assist the Protestant Christians who had come south following the 1954 partition of Vietnam. He described the missionaries as friendly, but they "never had the social outlook. ... They feel that all is done that should be done once [people] are saved and have gotten some instruction on how to study the Bible.")

The Stauffers quickly took to their new assignment and their new environment. "Our first impressions of Viet Nam, our home for the next 5 years, have been very pleasant ones," Arlene Stauffer reported back to the United States. "Our main frustration—the language barrier, and we are confident God will enable us to overcome that in His strength that the gospel may go forward." They began language study on June 22 under the tutelage of a 23-year-old ECVN member, Mr. Hao, whose brother was a pastor in central Vietnam. The Stauffers studied with him for two hours a day five days a week.

On June 30, exactly one month after arriving, James, through an interpreter, delivered his first sermon in Vietnam, at a Chinese church in Saigon's Chinatown. Four weeks later he preached at one of the city's six ECVN congregations, with Mr. Hao translating. Present that morning was the wife of the CMA Vietnam administrator, prompting James to wonder if she was there to assess the appropriateness of the new missionary's beliefs. Mr. Hao had informed the Stauffers of a rumor that the pastor of another church was raising questions about Mennonite nonresistance. The Stauffers were concerned that differences on this issue would cause a greater divide between CMA and the Mennonite missionaries. But the peace position did not prevent the CMA missionaries the next month to invite the Stauffers to lead the evangelistic services each Tuesday evening at a new youth center they had started.

Then there was the Stauffers' ongoing orientation. After being in the country for only two weeks, they traveled by taxi to the MCC unit, about 400 miles north of Saigon. The Stauffers met the members, toured the leprosarium where they worked and dined on wild boar that one of them shot. It was one of many journeys the Stauffers would make. They met ECVN president Le Van Thai, but they also had a visit from Mr. Ey, a prominent ECVN layman who was also a government official and close friend and political advisor to South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem. Arlene Stauffer observed that Mr. Ey was "rather lukewarm toward the existing [ECVN] church" and supported an independent movement. "Although we appreciate his friendship," she wrote, "we can see that he like other malcontents will make our situation here exceedingly delicate—they expect us to atone for any failings the CMA made in the past."

Relations with the CMA and ECVN would remain an issue as the Stauffers and Eastern Board worked at setting direction for their new work. "Regarding Mennonite Mission and National Church working relationships," Stauffer wrote to Eastern

Board headquarters, “we came to Viet Nam under the impression that our work would be largely separate and mostly independent as it has been in our other fields; that there would be only spiritual ties between us and the church here rather than organizational or physical ones. It took us awhile to realize what it is like to be in a country with only one Church. The more we learn to know and observe the Evangelical Church of Viet Nam the more we feel that our program should be a part of their framework or, at least in some way be identified with them.” Stauffer then referred to an earlier conversation he had with a representative from the World Council of Churches:

[The WCC representative] expressed quite frankly his concern [for] the unity of the ECVN and very strongly advised us against breaking it. ... I also told him frankly some of the points in which we could not be completely one with the Church here—the most important being nonresistance. He feels that our convictions would be healthy for the Church here and that the Church of Christ needs these different areas and degrees of conviction to complement each other. Only in the event of refusal or rejection by the ECVN would we be justified in going our own separate way. ... If, as a result of evangelization we would form congregations as part of the National Church, it would demand a certain amount of give and take on both sides. I doubt if our Board would approve of this plan. We ourselves are not completely resigned to all the implications of such a move. On the other hand we do not feel at all ready to work toward the goal of an independent Mennonite Church of Viet Nam.

This would only add confusion in the minds of the unsaved here. Denominationalism is a great stumbling block to the Oriental mind, and this is the only Asian country that has had a unified Protestant witness.

Miller replied that the Stauffers questions and concerns are “the ones that would be normal in a situation in which you are finding yourselves and at this stage. We from this end do not profess to have the answers either, but want to wait and pray with you so that the Spirit may lead us to them together.” He then counseled that the Stauffers should not “feel that you would have to come to firm decisions at once. The MCC work and witness should continue to be helpful too in evidencing to C&MA mission and Vietnamese church the felt spiritual ties and MCC also represents an integral facet of Eastern Board concern. We trust that the witness of these two arms of our church will continue to healthily and integrally supplement each other in Viet Nam.”

Meanwhile, immediate opportunities for ministry kept emerging. James got up at 3 a.m. one Sunday to travel into the Mekong River delta to visit the An Hoa church, nearly 90 miles away. He described the congregation as “simple peasants that love the Lord,” many of whom had walked three miles or more to come to the worship service. After the service they met an 88-year-old woman, a Christian for 40 years and whose pastor son was killed in the hostilities with the French. In Saigon, CMA missionaries asked the Stauffers to take charge of Saturday night meetings. They decided to begin an English language class using the Gospel of Mark as the text. Arlene would tell stories and use flannelgraph characters to illustrate the stories. They would also teach songs to participants, all in English.

English-language instruction presented other opportunities to witness. The Stauffers were riding bicycles along their street one October day when 18-year-old Nguyen Hung asked them if he could come to their home and practice English. At one of their first sessions, Hung asked about the Christian life and how he could become a Christian. James gave him a Bible and asked him to read Ephesians 2:1-10. As James and Mr. Hao were explaining those Scriptures, Hung suddenly said, “God has saved me. I have received

Members of an Evangelical Church of Vietnam congregation pray during a worship service. Eastern Mennonite Board of Charities began work in Vietnam without the intention of starting a new denomination in the country. Credit: Eastern Mennonite Missions

Christ and the burden is gone and a new joy has come to my heart.” The three then knelt in prayer for a verbal dedication of his new faith in Christ and thanksgiving to God.

Even though they were working in a land long-beset by violence, James and Arlene felt plenty secure. U.S. military personnel in Vietnam suffered their first casualties on October 22 when 13 Americans were wounded in three separate bombings of US Information Service and Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) installations in Saigon. James had gone to the U.S. Embassy that morning to get a signature as part of the Stauffers’ official registration and met Vice Consul Maxwell Berry. He had previously invited Arlene and James to his home for a Fourth of July celebration. Berry told him about the bombings, which Berry thought were “communist inspired.” That evening’s practice of the American Community Church choir, of which both Stauffers were members, was cancelled as the director was a MAAG member. Nevertheless, James wrote his parents, “we as missionaries do not feel any need for alarm since this attack was mainly against the military.”

One aspect of their work that wasn’t going well, at least for James, was grasping the Vietnamese tongue. “Language learning is coming slowly,” he wrote his parents in September. “Arlene is still ahead of me. She takes more time to practice than I do, and she can concentrate better than I can.” But a month later he wrote, “I was thrilled to read John 3:1-3 in our Vietnamese Bible today and discover that I was able to sort the right words out for the right meaning.” While progress was being made, it was certainly laborious. One Sunday James heard CMA’s Vietnam field administrator say every missionary must spend the first two years in full-time language study. Within four to five years he can begin to speak it fairly fluently, but it will take as long as a decade years to master the language. “This was some comfort to us as we are having so much trouble now trying to speak it fluently,” James wrote his parents. “Join me in prayer that I will concentrate when I do study. There is always something to distract—either the mosquitoes start to bite, or the servant wants us to fix something, or somebody comes to visit, etc.”

Change, however, wasn’t just happening in Vietnam for the Stauffers. Their conservative, traditional U.S. Mennonite communities mandated a head covering for women, while men were asked to wear a “plain” suit jacket without lapels. Arlene wore her covering in Vietnam, and James wore the regulation coat in formal settings, although he frequently wore no jacket at all.

But there were new developments stateside, and James asked his father to send a copy of a recent report from Virginia Conference. “I am looking forward to the resolution on attire that you are sending,” James wrote.

On November 18, nearly six months after the Stauffers arrived, they were joined by Everett and Margaret Metzler, the second Eastern Board couple assigned to Vietnam. Everett came from Lancaster, Pa., while Margaret grew up near Minot, N.D. Like the Stauffers, they met as students at EMC. Also like the Stauffers, the Metzlers proved to be well suited for the work in Vietnam. Earlier generations of Western missionaries left behind many of the amenities to which they were accustomed when they went overseas. But they often lived in well-furnished villas, eating familiar foods and traveling in the best transportation available. The Stauffers and Metzlers, however, represented a different mindset. They lived in a simple house like their Vietnamese neighbors, ate Vietnamese food, dressed simply and traveled on bicycles. Eight days after landing in Saigon, Everett Metzler reported to Kraybill that he and Margaret “are somewhat disgusted at ourselves for bringing so much ‘stuff’ along. Almost anything needed is obtainable here rather reasonably. We wonder what natives think when they see all our trunks and baggage. We are learning to appreciate the simplicity of their mode of living.”

The Stauffers and Metzlers lived in a simple house like their Vietnamese neighbors, ate Vietnamese food, dressed simply and traveled on bicycles.

In his first annual report to the Eastern Board office at the end of February 1958, James Stauffer wrote: “We thank God for His leading during this initial period of orientation and adjustment. We are happy in the Lord, healthy in mind and



As secretary of Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, Orie O. Miller was instrumental in selecting Vietnam as a mission field. The board had initially thrown its support behind starting work in Sumatra, but Miller convinced the board to change course and instead go to Vietnam.

Mennonite Church USA Archives-Goshen

body, and contented with the Oriental way of life.” He underscored language study as their primary task, but noted the contact with MCC and with the ECVN. The Stauffers had served three Chinese and five Vietnamese congregations in Saigon and five congregations in the Mekong Delta and attended the ECVN annual conference. James also observed that “the government is showing more and more her opposition toward Protestants. This is mainly the result of the Catholic influence that is being exerted by high government officials. Our convictions regarding non-resistance are bound to be strongly challenged sooner or later if the present attitude prevails.”

In the spring of 1958, rumors were circulating that President Diem had declared that Mennonites will not be authorized to work in Vietnam because of their opposition to war. In a letter to Miller and Kraybill, Stauffer said he was not taking the report too seriously because Diem was increasingly relying on American aid, including from MCC.

On June 2, 1958, one year and three days after the Stauffers landed as the first Mennonite missionaries in Vietnam, Orie Miller flew in for a two-week visit on behalf of both Eastern Board and MCC. He was looking to take the mission out of its infancy and expand its program. Miller recommended that Eastern Board secure a Vietnam headquarters and begin missionary work in Saigon. “In addition to the usual community approaches thru preaching, the Sunday school, summer Bible school, etc.,” he wrote, Eastern Board should utilize “student services, book shops, reading rooms and schools (from kindergarten up)” for missions and church planting. Miller also dreamt of a broader Eastern Board presence in Southeast Asia. He proposed the immediate recruitment and placement of a “teacher evangelist couple” and a single woman teacher in Vientiane, the capital of Laos, and envisioned missionaries also going to Phnom Penh in Cambodia and to a second city in southern Vietnam. He also called for sending two accredited single female elementary teachers to Saigon. Ultimately, Miller thought, Eastern Board could have as many as 25 workers in Southeast Asia.

With four workers in the country and more on the way, an Eastern Board missionary team had been created. James Stauffer was designated its director and Everett Metzler as business manager. But as Eastern Board’s efforts in Vietnam increased, so did the country’s instability. “Politically, things aren’t getting any better here,” James Stauffer wrote in August 1958. “There is much discontent among these Tribes people. The

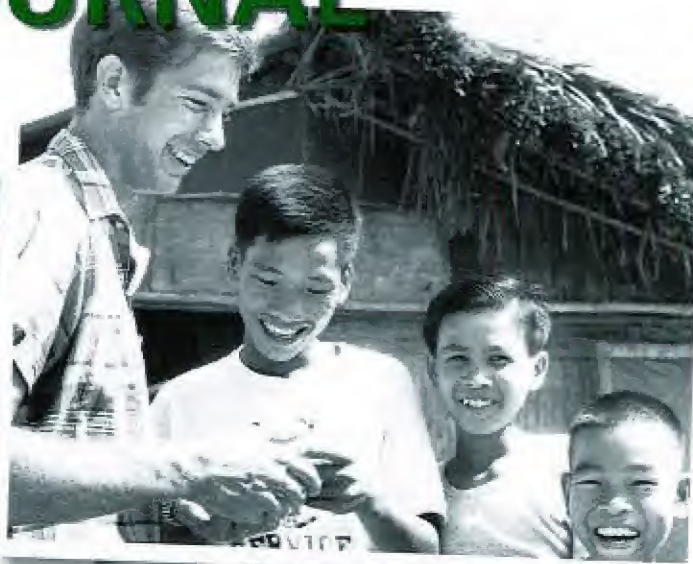


This church building was destroyed by the infamous 1968 Tet Offensive. Despite the violence around them, the first Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities workers in Vietnam reported feeling secure, as attacks usually targeted military targets. Mennonite Church USA Archives-Goshen

Vietnamese government wants them to move out of the mountains and resettle the lowlands but they don’t like to live in the lowlands. The Vietnamese treat these people much like we treated the American Indians. This, of course, is a wonderful opportunity for the communists. They are working hard among them and North Vietnam even has radio broadcasts in the tribal languages. Reliable reports state that some of the Radey tribesmen have been sent to Russia for technical training and political education, etc. This, along with Cambodia’s recognition of Red China and her border disputes with Vietnam, plus the political crisis in Laos, and North Vietnam’s desire to take over the South, puts us in a hot spot. Truly, ‘we know not what the future holds, but we know Who holds the future,’ as the song goes.”

Luke Martin served with Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities in Vietnam from 1962 to 1977. He currently resides in Allentown, Pa.

VIETNAM JOURNAL



Like thousands of other young men, **Doug Hostetter** went to Vietnam in the summer of 1966. He went, however, not as a soldier in the U.S. military but as a service worker with Mennonite Central Committee. In extensive and insightful journals, which are excerpted here, Hostetter recorded his experiences and observations on faith, love, war, ethics, politics and the Vietnamese people.

American in Saigon – July 6, 1966

To be an American in Saigon has both its benefits and its liabilities. I often wish that I was not—but how many 6'2" brown haired Vietnamese men do you know! Yes, I will have to admit that I am an American but I will try to make clear my separation from the military.

I took a walk today just to observe the people—see their reaction to me and my reaction to them. For the first time in my life I think I experienced hatred for being an American—no, it wasn't anything that I had done, these people didn't even know me at all—it was just that I was clearly an American. It is terrible to think how we do this all the time, we hate someone without ever knowing the guy at all—just because he has a certain color of skin, belongs to a certain nation, goes to a certain church or is associated with a certain group.

It was the faces of the women that told the most. One could almost tell which ones had lost husbands or sons in the war. The women know what the real price of war is—they are the ones who really suffer. I could not really blame them for giving me an icy, bitter stare. I was the symbol of the bomb which killed her relative. I was the symbol of continual fighting and her feelings could not be concealed even under an oriental face.

I think that during the next three years I will have to suffer often for the sins of America. I will have to absorb hostilities which I don't really deserve—but isn't this after all what it means to follow Christ's footsteps?

COs? They're nuts! – Kontum, October 7, 1966

In my first four months here in Vietnam, I have had many opportunities to chat with the American GIs who are over here fighting. I have never tried to hide the fact that I am a CO and have obvious differences of opinion from most of the people with whom I talk. But neither have I flaunted my convictions as the only and absolute answer to the questions which all of us in Vietnam are facing.

Much of Doug Hostetter's work as a Mennonite Central Committee worker was simply listening to and talking with the Vietnamese people, such as participants in an MCC job-creation project making bamboo cups (left) and students in a literacy class (right).

Mennonite Church USA Archives-Goshen

Different people have reacted in quite different ways when it has come out in the conversation that I am a conscientious objector. Most people have shown genuine tolerance and many have expressed sympathy for the stand which I take. In fact, the only people who have reacted with violent objections to my convictions, oddly enough, have been some of the protestant missionaries.

I received my most surprising response the other night from a 42 year old retired naval officer. He has spent over twenty-four years in the US Navy, some of which was spent commanding one of the off-shore naval vessels fighting in Vietnam. He is now back in Vietnam working for USAID. In the course of our conversation, he asked me what my relationship was to the Armed Forces. I replied that I was a conscientious objector. There was an awkward silence; I shifted uneasily.

"I want to tell you in French what I think of that," he said as he pulled my head closer and kissed me on both cheeks. "God bless you, Sonny. ... You know, I have convictions too, but I can't seem to carry them out."

What are we doing? – November 17, 1966

I have been in Vietnam only a few months, but because of my job (exploring new communities to discover if we should set up programs there) I have been able to travel widely, see many aspects of the war, and look at our work in the country. I have been able to visit six of the seven projects which we now have in operation.

However, I see a few flaws in working only in the areas in which we are now involved. We are serving in areas under the control or partial control of the Vietnamese National Government. We have no people serving in VC controlled areas or North Vietnam.

Thus while we are proudly proclaiming love and service to all people regardless of race, ideology, or nationality, in fact we are loving and serving only the people who by choice or default are living under the influence of the GVN. We are willing to love and help "bad" people, but only if they are willing to live in the "good" part of the country. We further emphasize our willingness to help "bad" people if they are willing to live in "good" country by giving food support to a government Chieu Hoi camp (program for VC to return for re-education).

In essence, I feel that we are doing the same thing as the Military Civic Actions teams and USAID, who are also serving people who live in "good" country. I have been further confirmed in this opinion by the many military men with whom I have had opportunity to talk. The VN and US military are definitely behind us in our program, evidenced by the \$1,000.00 gift which the Air Force gave us for our Pleiku Hospital. I have had great cooperation from all the military and government men whom I have contacted. They often express that they feel that our work is very important in the winning of this war. Two weeks ago, an Army captain told me, "You know, I'm just like you guys. I had wanted to come over here in psychological warfare and work with the people just like you are."

I feel that our message of peace and a God who is above nations and ideologies has been badly muddled. In fact, I think it has often been misunderstood to be support of our government's actions in the war.

Abbreviations

- ARVN – Army of the Republic of (South) Vietnam
- CO – Conscientious objector to war
- GVN – Government of the Republic of (South) Vietnam
- MACV – Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, the unified command structure for all U.S. military forces in Vietnam
- USAID – United States Agency for International Development, a federal agency
- VC – Viet Cong, Communist military force opposing South Vietnam and the United States
- VN – Vietnam
- VNCS – Vietnam Christian Service, a joint relief and development program of Church World Service, Lutheran World Relief and Mennonite Central Committee and administered by MCC

I do not feel that what we are now doing is intrinsically wrong; it is only wrong if this is all that we are doing. I feel strongly that we should be working in areas controlled by the VC. I realize that there are hazards involved in this, but truth is seldom proclaimed without encountering hazards. There are a number of groups now operating in VC areas, in spite of the hazards (e.g. the Swiss medical team in Kontum Province and the French Priests in the Dak To district).

I am afraid that any such program would have to be separate, but possibly associated with VNCS. Our organization's use of military shipping and transportation, APO mail services and PX privileges would keep us from giving impartial, nonpolitical service to the Vietnamese people. As we now operate the VC would have little reason to believe that we were not part of the U.S. war machine. Any program started would have to remain distinctly separate from all government aid and control. Only then would it be free to be truly and impartially Christian.

Christmas starts early – Tam Ky, December 15, 1966

This evening after supper Bill and I went to visit the priest—he wasn't in yet, so we went into the huge cathedral-like church and just sat, thought and prayed. It was really wonderful, I really unwound. There were only two Vietnamese in the whole church and the kids didn't come in at all. I just told God all my frustrations and tensions. As I sat there alone in the big silence, I could feel myself relaxing and the tensions fading away.

I guess for the first time in a long time I just forgot about environment and relaxed. It was really refreshing. I felt I had met God in a real way and He had shared my burdens. When I got up I was ready to face life.

Love: American custom? – Tam Ky, January 7, 1967

I just returned from Saigon today where we finally worked through negotiations for a house here in Tam Ky. When I returned to Tam Ky I was in great spirits but a long talk with the [Evangelical Church of Vietnam] pastor soon quelled this. I could hardly believe the pastor's statements. He informed us that he and the church committee were quite unhappy that we were planning to move to the Catholic High School.

Not only did he say that the Catholics aren't Christian, but when I came back with the fact that Christians were to love all people—even bad people, he informed me that this was only an American custom and the Vietnamese protestants don't have that custom, they love only protestants. One of the youth told us later that it was because of the pastor's "self love" that he didn't want us to move—it would hurt his pride. It is a bit discouraging having to work with a man like this. I still don't know how we will handle this problem.

A friend dies – Saigon, January 22, 1967

Yesterday I had my first real contact with death in Vietnam—a person I knew personally was killed. Death seems far away and unreal when it strikes others, but it suddenly becomes real when you realize that a friend of yours is no longer around. Major Lowry of Dak To was killed in a VC ambush a couple of weeks ago. I had stayed with him for about three days when doing my research in Dak To. Life is cheap in Vietnam.

Defense against V.C. – Tam Ky, January 27, 1967

Today for the first time I ventured out into the officially declared VC country. We are living only about 150 yards from the railroad track which is the limit of Government control in this area. It was almost by accident that I crossed over. I was looking for bricks for a bookcase and had asked the kids to help me find them after searching in vain for a few minutes. One said he knew where there were plenty at an old house and if I would take him on the scooter, he would show me.

So we went over together to a beautiful spot where an old brick house lay in ruins surrounded by grass and brittlenut trees. We gathered our bricks and walked back—on the way back he told me that his mother had told him never to come over there because many VC lived there. We,

The best defense against the VC is no defense (and a strong faith). I now sleep with the windows wide open.

however, met only a small child and couple of dogs.

I am going on the theory that the best defense against the VC is no defense (and a strong faith). I now sleep with the windows wide open—in fact right now I have the windows and door open and my light on bright. Anyone could walk right in if he wished. When walls are built up you can no longer tell that it is a human being behind the wall so it's easy to try to kill it. It is my theory that it is hard to hate someone who you know is human.

Feel with the people – Tam Ky, January 30, 1967

I think I am beginning to know a bit of the psychology of the people living here in Tam Ky. With the people visibly expecting a VC attack before Tet (today USAID had a 50 caliber machine gun mounted on top of the roof of their house) and the fighting going on around I too never know for sure whether I will live through the night.

There is absolutely no defense of our house to the west—and that is where the VC territory is. I must admit that I have a bit more anxiety than before—but not real fear. I think these people are also the same. It is impossible for one to live in a continual state of fear, it is just too exhausting.

I guess I too have taken on some of the notorious eastern fatalism—you live in the present, and leave the future to take care of itself. Like tonight after supper, we felt like playing with the kids that continually pester us around our house, so we went out and played games and sang songs with them until dark. When the Americans started bombing south of town and the flashes of the explosions lit the southern sky and even when the guards nearby started shooting their machine guns, adding the red streaks of tracer bullets to the darkening sky—we just kept playing and singing. We created our little bit of heaven in the midst of hell. You could just tell that God was there with us, healing tired spirits and joining together brothers from opposite sides of the globe and bringing peace and joy in the presence of war.

Tonight I am closer to understanding the Vietnamese people and God.

In a heavy attack – Tam Ky, February 7, 1967

Man, I really missed my journal the last couple of days. So much has happened and now it is so cold that I doubt if I can bring it back to life.

[Mennonite Central Committee Vietnam administrator] Paul Longacre surprised us and dropped in Saturday a little before 2:00. Since Bill had an extra bed at Due Tri High School I spent the two nights that Paul was here with Bill.

Sunday night we had a real great meeting with Paul, I gained new respect for him that night. About 10:30 we started to go home and as we went out the back door we saw that the whole sky to the west was lit up by flares, probably about 5-10 miles out. Bill and I climbed up on the roof and I took pictures of the falling flares and flashes from the bombing out there.

It struck me that I was so used to seeing this that it didn't really bother me. I guess one cannot continue to empathize with suffering (at best not empathize deeply) when it is practically constant, especially if it is a bit removed. About 11:00 Bill and I went back to Duc Tri High School.

About 1:00 a.m. we were awakened by mortars and firing out in the direction of our big house. It was really bad, the sky was all lit up by flares. Fifty caliber and small arms fire was almost constant and interspersed by larger explosions. Bill and I just watched, listened, and prayed, there was nothing else to do. Other firing broke out on both the north and south end of town, but the mass of the fighting was west of town. The fighting went on until a little after two and then there was a deathly silence. We could tell nothing except that they likely hadn't hit the ammo dump near the house—or we would have heard it.

The next morning we heard the story from the girls and Paul. They had just gone to sleep when the first mortars came in. The shock from the concussion of the mortar rounds almost knocked them out of bed. Paul came into the girls room and they all crowded under the beds to

wait it out. It must have really been harrowing—no safe place to go and knowing the house could be hit at any time or worse yet, if the ammo dump were hit, it was all over. The battle was over and they had gone back to their separate rooms, when USAID stopped over to evacuate them to the USAID house at about 4:00 a.m. They had all gone and then came back about 7:00.

The toll of the battle was 32 killed, one American at MACV was killed by one of the first mortar rounds, four policemen and most of the rest I believe were civilians. The VC had aimed at almost every government post: CIA, both vehicles destroyed; USAID, two holes in their front wall and one in the small house and one of the corner bunkers on the roof almost destroyed by recoilless rifle (57 cal., I think). They also had a lot of small arms fire on both houses, but one guard injured; 6th Vietnam regiment hit by mortars; MACV hit by mortar fire, one killed; some sort of police headquarters hit and four men killed. The District was aimed at but missed; and of course the bridges were harassed.

A MACV guy said there were only two important Government places which weren't hit—one of them was the ammo dump by our house. Our house got away almost scot free in spite of the fact that it was practically right in the middle of all that was happening. Only one small bullet even hit the house—and that came from the friendly (?) side. We found a mortar had hit about 40 yards in front of our house, but because of the fact it landed in a gully, we didn't even get fragments.

Some of our neighbors didn't fare so well. We lost one woman that lives about 100 yards south of the house, a mortar or recoilless rifle shell came right through the end of the house. A lady about 75 yards away had a mortar come right through the roof of her house and destroyed almost all she owned. She wasn't hurt because she was in her small bomb shelter beside the house. The house across from USAID looked like half of it was just blown to bits. Miraculously he and his family got out alive, but he lost all his livestock: two cows, three pigs, geese and chickens. It was really tragic to go in to visit those neighbors of ours who had lost everything they owned right before Tet, the time of year that all is supposed to be merry and prosperous.

Two of our neighbors asked us for help so we helped them. To the women we gave 5000 piasters and to another we bought glasses to replace her broken ones and 1,000 piasters for other needs. We want to follow up after that and help them get tin to replace their roofs from the government.

USAID threatens – Tam Ky, February 17, 1967

Just got back from conference at Dalat. It was really relaxing and revitalizing, but I am glad to be back home to Tam Ky.

Stopped and had a good talk with Bob Kenny of USAID tonight. I asked him about some of the tensions between us and USAID and their causes. He said just our existence here as pacifists was a threat to most of them. He said most of them either have served their time or are serving their time and they look at us as "draft dodgers." I think it is a kind of jealousy because we are so close to the people and so free from fear and hate.

Our houses are only 200 yds. apart, and both the same distance from the VC territory, but they have 12 guards, big lights, six foot wall, sand bags and barbed wire while our house is in the open, not even a fence around us. During the VC attack they received eight hits from 57 and 78 cal recoilless rifle while we were not hit at all.

Bob also informed us that they were currently checking us out and if they found that we were doing any proselytizing for pacifism we would be out in two days. We have the real challenge of living love here.



Mennonite Central Committee Vietnam administrator Paul Longacre in front of an Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities center in Saigon. Mennonite Church USA Archives-Goshen

I listened to the Easter section of the Messiah by radio and ate a chocolate bar I had been saving for the occasion. This really made me homesick.

Easter blues – Tam Ky, March 26, 1967

Today is Easter and needless to say, different than any Easter I have ever been through. I got up early because I was planning to go to early mass with one of my Catholic friends, but at the last minute he backed out. I went to the Protestant service, it wasn't too bad except that they really crucified the Easter songs they sang. I came back to the house and listened to the Easter section of the Messiah by radio and ate a chocolate bar I had been saving for this occasion. This really made me homesick, but it also was probably the only time all day that I felt at all like it was Easter. I really could feel sorry for myself. My Easter dinner really topped it off—rice, as usual, and by myself.

I probably could have really gotten down in spirits but Kho came over about 2:00 and we chatted and read till 4:00 and biked until 6:00. I then ate supper at a restaurant downtown—even enjoyed it. I decided to stop and see Muoi on the way home. We really had a nice time—discussing his future and what we would do if he worked full-time after tests. They insisted that I eat with them, so I had a second supper. Just the feeling of being with friends and being accepted was great.

I came home about 8:30 and went out to get some moonlight shots with my camera. I heard a shot and a half-dozen ARVN soldiers came running up and insisted there was a VC in the immediate area. They had seen him and shot at him. They set off a flare behind the house and then proceeded to search the neighborhood.

I decided it was best to call off the photography for the night and go to USAID and watch the movie. The guard told me it wasn't safe, but I decided if it isn't safe for me to go to USAID at full moon I'd better leave Tam Ky. The movie was good and I caught up on all the gossip. Convoy shot to hell between here and Danang; VC digging trenches around hamlets less than four kilometers away; USAID afraid that the VC will try to mine our house and the prefabs they are building. USAID is now closing off the well from use by the neighbors and will start to build their wall in about a week. I'm not sure how the community will react to this—it will be interesting to see—but will likely cause problems.

V.C. revenge – Tam Ky, April 6, 1967

Well, the VC got their revenge last night—they came into town and blew up two houses on main street. They were public officials homes straight across from Mr. Hien's drug store about 75 yards from our new house. The ruins were still smouldering when I rode back from Duc Tri this a.m. Miraculously, no one was killed, but one woman was fairly seriously injured.

Everyone is on edge here in Tam Ky. Even the ambassador in Danang has threatened to evacuate the civilians. If he decides to, I will be faced with the difficult decision whether to leave with the American civilians or stay with the Vietnamese people. It would look bad to pull out, and would identify us with the Americans, but to stay might be a burden and a danger to the people here. I guess I will have to wait and see when the situation comes up.

The city itself seemed to be afraid tonight. I went walking the streets tonight at about 9:00 and already three-fourths of the shops had their doors shut and barred and when the police came walking through the town at 10:00 blowing the curfew whistle, most of the rest of the town closed up. Now all is quiet except the muffled voice of the temple gong and the occasional nervous, spasmodic shots.

Cleanup operations – Tam Ky, April 7, 1967

It's still early in the evening, but I feel exhausted already. Today I discovered the extent to which the VC had accomplished their mission the other night, and tried to give some temporary assistance.

Thirty VC entered town the other night and it seems must have had pretty free run of the town. They set off explosions at four different places and kidnapped three people. I think they

suffered only one casualty. It seems that all the forces (guarding the city) that weren't themselves VC, ran. It was only a faulty fuse on a 44 lb. plastic bomb that kept the bridge in front of the Chaus, and likely their house too, from being destroyed.

The explosions and the fires that followed (because everyone was afraid to try to put them out for fear of being shot by VC) left twelve families homeless—many of them without a thing in the world except the clothes they had on.

I decided that I couldn't stand by with a house full of goods. I asked Mr. Tung, Sec. of the labor union, if he would go with me and help me give some things to the people. He said he was busy and couldn't go, so I suggested to him that I get Pastor Ke to go with me. He said that Mr. Ke wouldn't go because the people weren't Christians and the pastor would feel that he couldn't help non-Christians while he still had poor Christians. I was almost relieved because I knew if I took the pastor, it would be a constant asking for things for his Christians from then on out.

We made up a small roll of clothes, a health kit and two student kits for each of the twelve families and took them to the families in person.

It was exhausting to see the destruction and suffering at the bombing sites, and to meet the people who had undergone these hardships. I think the giving of something material to people was the most exhausting thing of all. I despise being in the role of the rich American helping the poor—but in this case I feel it was completely justified.

Long way to the outhouse – Tam Ky, November 28, 1967

The town has been noisy tonight. There has been quite a bit of shooting from what sounded like the street—some has been quite close. I was just faced with the perplexing problem of whether it is better to [go to the bathroom] in a box inside in safety or go outside and risk getting shot by ARVN or the VC I decided that with my diarrhea I would chance being shot at. I took a light so that at least my assassin would not have to fear that I were trying to sneak up on him—all went well ...

Cleanup work begins – Tam Ky, February 2, 1968

Yesterday the curfew was on all day again, but you could feel that the tension had relaxed some. About 2:00 one of the old men from the church stopped by to tell us that four of our bamboo workers homes had been burned the night before as well as about 40 other houses.

I took off right away for the area and Bill took the bike and headed out to see how the resettlement center and Tu Hup had fared. When I got out to the camp, Em Tuy (5 years old) ran up and grabbed my hand and told me that her house had been burned to the ground. The camp was really a pathetic place with about 60 houses burned to the ground.

Some said that it was American airplanes and some claimed it was the Vietnamese military construction camp guards, but it really didn't make much difference at that stage. It was really disheartening to meet these people who I knew so well, and hear them tell how everything they owned had been destroyed. I decided to see if I could do something to help them.

I went back and talked to a number of kids from both the Protestant and Catholic youth groups here in town and asked them if they would be interested in working to help clean up the houses. I said that all that were interested should meet at the Protestant church at 2:00 that afternoon. I then went to USAID to see if I could get some tools. They had plenty, so I took 14 shovels, 4 picks, a rake and three hoes. It was the last day of Tet and the town was still technically under curfew, so I thought I would be lucky to get a dozen kids. By 3:00 about 35 kids showed ready to work. Denh was the guy who really took hold of things, I had no idea how to start, but Denh had been outworking by himself that morning. The houses were still smoldering when we got there and much of the debris was too hot to move with the bare hand, but the kids really pitched in and worked.

I was hoping that there would be more mixing of the Protestant and Catholic kids, but

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they kind of stuck to their own groups—at least that way they had strong leadership in each group. Around 5:00 I slipped over to MACV and bought 2 cases of cokes. We all rested and drank cokes and then headed for home.

An execution – Tam Ky, February 7, 1968

I'm really too tired to write well, but I feel I must get down some of the things I have seen, heard and experienced today. Today I took 24 students up to Thang Binh to help clean up the refugee camps which were burned last week. The kids worked hard when we finally got up there and we had a really great time, but the stories that came out of there were little short of hell.

The figures vary depending on who you talk to and when you talk to them but they range in number from 130-300 "enemy killed." Of this number an American told me only 2 persons were actually VC soldiers, the rest were civilians, evidently killed while they were demonstrating. The VC tried to repay the debt by burning two refugee camps and killing as many of the occupants as possible. Over 40 people were killed, many of them women and children as the VC ran through the camp throwing hand grenades into their bomb shelters. They report one GVN soldier killed.

Today as I went into the district headquarters the [GVN] soldiers had just brought in 10 people they had captured on an operation. There was one grey haired man, one young man who looked to be in his early 20s and the rest looked like they were from 28 to 35 years old. One man had been wounded in the leg, it was not bandaged, and still bleeding. When I arrived, they were all sitting on the ground blindfolded and the soldiers were tying their arms behind them and tying them together in groups of three. The old man they decided to free, but the rest they yanked to their feet. They marched them blindfolded and tied together through the entire length of town. The one with the wounded leg couldn't walk, so the one in front of him carried him on his back.

As they marched through the street, there was no shouting and rejoicing from the towns people. The faces which I saw all looked sad and frightened. The wounded man slipped from the back of the one who was carrying him, a Vietnamese soldier kicked the wounded, blindfolded and bound man in the buttocks—he struggled back on the back of his buddy and they staggered on—blood dripping from his leg.

When they reached the high school I stopped following and went in and worked with the students and tried not to think and feel. At the edge of town one of the Vietnamese soldiers sent all the children back. In a few minutes there were two volleys of shots and then all was quiet.

G.I. deserters – Tam Ky, September 11, 1968

Yesterday began a new phase in my fight against the war in Vietnam. Yesterday I was able to shelter and assist four Marines who were running away from the Marine Corps and the war. It all happened so innocently and so unexpectedly, I am sure that there was divine guidance in it.

I was driving the pick-up truck back to the house before going to supper. I saw these four G.I.s standing by the bridge at the middle of town. I stopped to give them a lift to the edge of town. As we passed my house, I pointed it out and told the guy in the front seat that it was getting late, if they couldn't catch a ride before dark, just walk back to my house, and I would put them up for the night. The guys seemed nice enough, and I felt like I was well enough known here in Tam Ky that people wouldn't misunderstand. When they came back I was just leaving for supper—I asked if they were interested in a Vietnamese meal—they all seemed quite eager.

While we were riding to supper the guy in the front seat beside me said he enjoyed

reading a lot and said he had two books with him, I asked him what they were. He replied that one was by Camus and the other by Russel. I couldn't believe it. I said, "Do you mean to say that you are a marine and you read Camus and Russel?"

Supper was enjoyable and you could tell that the guys really loved it, they said that they couldn't believe that life like this existed in Vietnam. I had told them they should leave their guns back at the house before they went to supper—and they thought that was too cool, to walk out in the town without their guns.

When we got back to the house I told them to make themselves at home and help themselves to any books they might want to read—when I returned they had picked out these books: *Gandhi*, *The Communist Manifesto*, *The Pursuit of God* and Tillich's *The Courage to Be*. One said, "I take it you don't dig this war." I said, "Yes, I believe you're right."

And then they spilled out all of their grievances against the Marine Corps and the war. They also said that they had left Chu Lai without permission and had hoped to catch a ride on up to Danang, but had only gotten this far. We talked, shared, laughed and almost cried until late in the night. I told them they must make a final decision that night and I would try to give them help either way they decided.

They were all so different and their reasons were also so different. Manuel and Robin were both rather simple guys who spoke English with a slight accent and thought of things on everyday levels. I think they were both Catholic. Neither were full Americans, one from Germany and the other from Puerto Rico. They felt that they were involved in a war that wasn't theirs and in which they had no say. They held nothing against the Vietnamese and didn't like to kill or fight. They also resented being told what to do all of the time.

William was a Jew from a very wealthy family. He had been spoiled and always given everything he wanted as a child. He was now reacting against the Marine Corps. He had broken all of the things that belonged to the Corps that he could break. He had deliberately defied orders whenever he could and did all he could to hurt the Marine Corps.

Dennis was the one who had made the moral decision on the deep intellectual and moral level. He was the one who had had two years of college and studied philosophy. He felt that the war was wrong and he had to leave it. I immediately identified with him.

The next morning they had all decided to make the break final. I got them the names of one of the German doctors in Danang who is sympathetic to what they are trying to do as well as an American friend to whom I sent a personal letter. I also gave them the address of our MCC unit in Hong Kong and told them that anywhere in the world the Mennonites and the Quakers were their friends. I also explained that they must believe in themselves and their decision. They must know that they are right, believe it and act like it regardless of the consequences.

Doug Hostetter served with Mennonite Central Committee in Vietnam from 1966 to 1969. He is currently MCC's United Nations liaison, based in New York City.



Vietnamese displaced by the long-running war in their country flee en masse from one village to another. Mennonite Church USA Archives-Goshen



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An inspiring exhibition of faith

It is a truism that the Vietnam War was one of the ugliest chapters in American history. It was a military and political quagmire that took years to escape, during which time thousands of casualties, government machinations, unprecedented media coverage and an overall changing of the generational guard all combined to shake the country to its foundations. We still feel the reverberations today, nearly four decades after the last U.S. troops left Vietnam.

But if the war was one of the country's darkest hours, it was one of the brightest for Mennonites, particularly for the forerunners of Mennonite Church USA. As this issue of *Mennonite Historical Bulletin* shows, North American Mennonites responded to the conflict in Southeast Asia by boldly proclaiming Christ in word and deed.

Not that it was easy. Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Mennonite Central Committee personnel found themselves working in one of the most volatile, most dangerous regions of the world. One person even gave his life. With bombs exploding around them and bullets whizzing over them, the Vietnam workers were on the frontlines of the struggle between heavenly and earthly powers—and they declared

their primary allegiance was not to this world and its weaponry.

So did many of their sisters and brothers in the United States. They participated in demonstrations and wrote letters to the editor. Mennonite periodicals spotlighted the war's evils while denominational officials urged love for the enemy. Some Mennonites even went to prison for refusing to participate in an unjust system. It was the first time the church had spoken out so publicly and so strongly against the government.

This is, of course, a simplistic and over-generalized description. Issues such as peace, authority and morality are actually onions with many layers. Peel away one and there is another one underlying it. What's more, the peeling process led some Mennonites to support the war or, at least, oppose vociferous opposition to it.

But that does not diminish the fact that many Mennonites put God's love and

compassion into action, even at great personal risk, amid gross hatred and violence. It was a grand and inspiring exhibition of the pursuit of faithfulness. —*Rich Preheim*



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The General Conference Mennonite Church at 150

Great Trek documentary wins Emmy Award

The title song of a documentary about the Mennonite Great Trek to Central Asia has received a regional Emmy Award for musical composition/arrangement. The song was arranged by a graduate of Bethel College in North Newton, Kan., and performed by the Bethel College Concert Choir.

Through the Desert Goes Our Journey tells of a group of Russian Mennonite colonists who, under the leadership of Claas Epp, in 1880 left for Central Asia to wait for Christ's return. The group eventually settled in present-day Uzbekistan. Epp's predictions failed to materialize, but the group established a community that lasted until 1935, when the Soviets forced them to relocate. The film's co-producers were Walter Ratliff of Herndon, Va., and 2005 Bethel graduate Jesse Nathan of San Francisco.

"Through the Desert Goes Our Journey" is an old and obscure hymn that uses the more familiar tune of "Heart with Loving Heart United." It is thought that the participants on the Great Trek sang it during dark times. Dan Graber, a 2008 Bethel graduate, arranged the hymn for the documentary, which was then sung by the choir. Andy Gingerich, a 2005 graduate, accompanied on guitar.

The Emmy was awarded by the Heartland Chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and

Sciences. It is one of 19 regional chapters of the academy and includes Kansas, Oklahoma, Nebraska and Colorado.

Martyr book reveals Anabaptists' occupations

Of the thousands of people in the *Martyrs Mirror*, most are not identified with their occupations. Others are described as ministers. But a quick perusal of the book, which marks its 350th anniversary this year, reveals at least 70 martyred Anabaptist men who were involved in more than 30 businesses and trades.

The most popular occupations were tailor (14 men) and shoemaker (11 plus one cobbler). Other jobs ranged from those that are still common today—such as baker, carpenter and potter—to the more obscure, such as corn porter and fuller (a job in the textile industry).

Their workaday occupations helped make some Anabaptists targets for persecution. "We have studied at universities, and spent our money for this money," one critic is quoted in the *Martyrs Mirror*. "Now, should these asses come and teach us? One is nothing but a cobbler; another a weaver or furrier, and these want to quote Scripture. Let them remain at their trades; [quoting Scripture] is our province; nor will we tolerate it; it must be opposed with fire, water and sword."

—*Marketplace*

Discontinued in 2008, journal has new life

A year and a half after it was discontinued, the journal *Mennonite Life* has been resurrected. Publisher Bethel College in North Newton, Kan., stopped the 62-year-old magazine in 2008, citing decreasing readership.

Since then, however, Bethel faculty and administrators had been holding wide-ranging discussions about reviving and revamping *Mennonite Life*. It became available only as an online periodical in 1999, and that will continue, said history professor Mark Jantzen, who chairs the editorial committee. But the new version will be come out annually rather than quarterly as had been done previously.

It will also "engage a broader circle of faculty and staff as an editorial and advisory council in order to solicit content from a wider network of contacts," Jantzen said. "We will also be more intentional about including student writing and essay material available on campus and from other venues. We are especially pleased that the work of the annual 'Mennonite Bibliography' can continue."

The summer 2010 issue of *Mennonite Life* can be accessed at www.bethelks.edu/mennonitelife/index.php. Included in the issue is the complete text of James Stayer's 2008 Menno Simons Lectures at Bethel on early Anabaptism, a presentation by Cal Redekop on the fate of Paraguay's indigenous populations and an examination of Kansans' involvement with the anti-war Peace Ribbon Project in the 1980s.



Civilian Public Service workers' most common denominational affiliations (other than Mennonite, Brethren and Quaker)

1. Jehovah's Witnesses – 409 workers
2. Congregational Christian – 209 workers
3. Church of Christ – 199 workers
4. Presbyterian – 197 workers
5. Northern Baptist – 178 workers

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Four writers reflect on the legacy of the General Conference Mennonite Church 150 years after its founding



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by Rich Preheim

On the cover: Counterclockwise from top: The General Conference Mennonite Church mission at Darlington, Okla., ca. 1884. Cornelius H. Wedel, the first president of Bethel College in North Newton, Kan., the oldest Mennonite school in the United States. Seventy-fifth anniversary celebration at Spring Valley Mennonite Church, Newport, Wash., 1999. Early GCMC leader John H. Oberholtzer. Annie Funk, missionary to India, who died in the sinking of the Titanic in 1912. Postcard from G. Wiens in Russia to Peter J. Wiens, missionary in India, 1906. The Bethel College Administrative Building in North Newton, Kan. Deaconesses and other staff at the Mennonite hospital in Beatrice, Neb., circa 1920. All cover photos from Mennonite Church USA Archives-North Newton

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Even though the General Conference Mennonite Church ceased to exist in 2002 with the creation of Mennonite Church USA, the new denomination has been and will continue to be affected by its legacy. On the occasion of the GCMC's 150th anniversary, four historians with great and varied church experiences reflect, sometimes quite personally, on its impact on Mennonite Church USA and the broader Mennonite fellowship.

This is by no means the last word on the matter. We must continue to assess how the GCMC contributed to—or detracted from—our current understandings of faithfulness. Of course, we must also perform that exercise on the Mennonite Church, the GCMC's partner in forming Mennonite Church and Mennonite Church Canada, as well as on countless other religious and secular forces around us. The church, after all, does not function in a vacuum.

One of the impetuses for the creation of the General Conference Mennonite Church was missions, and in 1880 the fledgling began work among the Cheyenne and Arapaho in Oklahoma. It was the first mission initiative by a North American Mennonite denomination. Pictured are early Oklahoma missionaries (left to right) Martha Moser, Maria Suderman, Jacob H. Richert, J.H. Schmidt, H.R. Voth, Frieda E. Voth, Abe Suderman, Anna Voth and Anna Penner.



Mennonite Church USA Archives-North Newton

Liberty in nonessentials

by James C. Juhnke



The General Conference Mennonite Church was born in 1860 on the second day of Pentecost in a small church in Lee County, Iowa. The founders had a dream to unite all Mennonites in North America into an association for aggressive kingdom work in Christian education, missions and service. U.S. and Canadian Mennonites at that point did not have a central denominational organization.

The dream was presumptuous. The 1860 GCMC founders represented a small circle of Iowa immigrant congregations, plus two delegates from the recently founded East Pennsylvania Mennonite Conference. The older and larger Mennonite area conferences in the concentrated settlements of Pennsylvania, Virginia, Ohio, Indiana and Ontario were not represented, although they were invited.

Nor were the more traditionally minded folk who came to be known as Old Mennonites interested in responding to the call for a more aggressive and public style of an American denomination. The GCMC grew very slowly. Fifteen years after its creation, it included only 24 congregations with 1,525 members. Nevertheless, to the end of the century and beyond, GCMC leaders claimed that their body, at least in theory, embraced all American Mennonites.

The great triumph of GCMC's first generation was to attract the membership of many of the Mennonites of Dutch origin who immigrated to America from Russia and Prussia in the 1870s and '80s. The GCMC became the only large body of North American Mennonites to successfully include major sections of both poles of Anabaptist origin in Europe—the Dutch and the North Germans on one hand and the Swiss and South Germans on the other.

This multi-ethnic origin of different GCMC congregations was one factor that dictated a congregational polity. The new denomination had to accept a greater variety of religious-cultural practices than did the Old and Amish Mennonites who, in 1898, created their own overall general conference. The GCMC did not have an organized mechanism to enforce obedience to conference resolutions. There was no prescribed conference creed. The denomination's intention was to allow "liberty in non-essentials," as one of the GCMC tenets proclaimed.

The GCMC found its unity in cooperative denominational activity. In the first decades they concentrated on Christian education. They founded the first Mennonite training center for pastors and missionaries at Wadsworth, Ohio. They recruited a German Pietist, Carl Justus van der Smitten, to direct the school. In the 1880s and following, the GCMC concentrated on missionary work. Van der Smitten hoped that all Mennonites, including those from the Netherlands and Russia who had pioneered missionary work in Java and Sumatra, would come together in an international missions agency. The first GCMC mission to what they called "heathen" peoples was among the Cheyenne

Upper left: The former Methodist Episcopal church in West Point, Iowa, where the General Conference Mennonite Church was formed, May 28-29, 1860.

Mennonite Church USA Archives-
North Newton



Carl Justus van der Smitten, administrator of the Wadsworth (Ohio) Institute.

Mennonite Church USA Archives-
North Newton



The Magpie family, early Oklahoma Cheyenne converts, ca. 1890.

Mennonite Church USA Archives-North Newton

and Arapaho tribes in Indian Territory (now Oklahoma). GCMC missionaries first went overseas to India in 1900.

The GCMC also pursued unity through ministries of Christian publication. The early denomination-wide periodicals were *The Mennonite* and *Christlicher Bundesbote*. The first Mennonite missions periodical in America, edited by Van der Smitten, was *Nachrichten aus der Heidenwelt* (*Reports from the Heathen World*.)

GCMC leaders of the founding generation hoped that the more conservative Mennonite groups would join the GCMC

as they gradually became convinced that centrally organized higher education and missionary efforts were important expressions of Christian witness. As it turned out, the Old Mennonites organized their own denominational projects apart from the GCMC. Mennonite ecumenical cooperation was a long time coming.

James C. Juhnke is professor emeritus of history at Bethel College, North Newton, Kan., and author of a number of books, articles and plays on Mennonite history.

Finding welcome and hospitality

by Robert S. Kreider

I was born into an Old Mennonite family, with my father, Amos E. Kreider, then a farmer and pastor of Science Ridge Mennonite Church at Sterling, Ill. My earliest memories of worship services, first at Science Ridge and then at College Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind., are of Dad in the pulpit wearing a plain coat and Mother beside me, wearing a prayer covering. I grew up comfortable in the Old Mennonite world of family and relatives.

Goshen College, where Dad was Old Testament professor and business manager, closed in 1923, and he began teaching at Witmarsum Theological Seminary, the inter-Mennonite school at Bluffton, Ohio. With my baptism on March 24, 1929, at First Mennonite Church in Bluffton, Ohio, I became a General Conference Mennonite, two years before my parents. I enjoyed my new GCMC home with its organ music, stained glass windows, bell, Christian Endeavor and college students as Sunday School teachers.



Amos and Stella Shoemaker Kreider and their sons, Gerald (left) and Robert, ca. 1935.

Mennonite Church USA Archives-North Newton

Following Witmarsum's closing in 1931, Dad was called to pastor First Mennonite Church. With many conference guests flowing through our home during Dad's pastorate, I became aware of a new cast of Mennonite leaders: N.B. and Silas Grubb, P.A. Penner, a variety of Krehbiels. Added to Scottdale, Pa., and Elkhart, Ind., in my background, new points of geographical reference appeared: Newton, Kan.; Upland, Calif.; Freeman, S.D.; Mountain Lake, Minn. Dimly I heard of church animosities, of those who were and were not considered "sound." I also became increasingly aware of the thousands of impoverished GCMC folks who had recently arrived in Canada from Russia. Our congregation hosted three of these families.

With our family's move in 1935 to Bethel College, a large, new GCMC world



Russian Mennonites flee the Soviet Union during World War II. Russian Mennonites were an important part of the General Conference Mennonite Church's development.

Mennonite Church USA Archives-North Newton

opened up to me. I was fascinated hearing Bethel president Ed G. Kaufman describe the diverse Mennonite ethnic groups in Kansas: those of Dutch background—Low Germans from the Ukraine, Poland and West Prussia; those of Swiss background—South Germans, Volhynians and Galicians; “pure” Swiss, such as those at Whitewater; Old Mennonites; and Amish. Such diversity could be found nowhere else in the world. I learned that each group had in a separate dialect, food, church polity and practices. Yet they had reluctantly come together by way of a common hymn book, school association, newspaper and concern for missions in Oklahoma territory among the Cheyenne and Arapaho. Here was an ecumenical phenomena of high significance and so modestly stated. Reading obituaries in *Mennonite Weekly Review*, I was intrigued how many church members were born in Russia. Around us were an immigrant people. That was 1935, the halfway point in the GCMC story.

Also in 1935, only four years after becoming a GCMC member, Dad was elected to the denominational Board of Foreign Missions. I was pleased how Dad and Mother, new in their GCMC affiliation, were embraced so hospitably. Dad was frequently invited to preach in other congregations. On occasions when I accompanied him, I was impressed with their conservative look and feel. Be it Depression poverty or frontier frugality, here appeared to be a genuine Mennonite simplicity. With Dad as a member of the mission board,

secretary P.H. Richert stopped frequently at the house. With no denominational headquarters, Richert appeared to carry the board files in his briefcase in a fantastic demonstration of Mennonite frugality.

During my four and a half years in Civilian Public Service, I felt a quiet satisfaction that men of GCMC affiliation were seen as qualified for leadership positions. The director of CPS Camp No. 5 at Colorado Springs, Colo., to which I was assigned, was Albert Gaeddert, a young GCMC pastor and former high school coach. He had a winsome pastoral touch in drawing together in our camp a diverse group of Mennonites and non-Mennonites. Throughout all the years of CPS, only GCMC men were selected as general directors: Henry Fast, Gaeddert, Erwin Goering and Elmer Ediger.

In June 1946, when U.S. authorities finally allowed the first relief supplies to enter devastated Germany after World War II, I was the Mennonite Central Committee representative on the ecumenical team of eight CRALOG (Council of Relief Agencies Licensed for Operation in Germany) members that coordinated distribution. I recall the first supplies to arrive were hundreds of tons of flour from the mills of Kansas: Whitewater, Buhler, McPherson. This was Mennonite flour, mostly GCMC flour. I walked tall in the eyes of my Catholic and Lutheran colleagues. It was in MCC's work on behalf of refugees that I learned to know scores of Canadian Mennonite colleagues, most of them GCMC and Mennonite Brethren. I viewed with admiration their competence in orchestrating the movement of thousands of refugees to Canada, Paraguay and Uruguay.

I have sketched here an upbeat, appreciative story of an Old Mennonite boy finding welcome in the General Conference Mennonite Church. In the postwar years I shared with my parents satisfaction and joy in each tentative, cautious, reluctant step in which the two denominations drew closer to each other. Vivid in my memory are the actions leading to the creation of Associated

Mennonite Biblical Seminary: a clandestine meeting of a few in the home of Harold Bender, a joint summer session of the two seminaries, the 1956 GCMC triennial assembly at Winnipeg when delegates decided to affiliate their Mennonite Biblical Seminary with the Mennonite Church's Goshen Biblical Seminary in Indiana.

I think of many other and differing threads—both of joy and of hurt—woven into the fabric of what now has become Mennonite

Church USA. Transcending all, I savor a host of dear friendships that bond us from two denominational streams. As a participant observer in this journey, I sense a guiding hand. I give thanks to the giver of all good gifts.

Robert S. Kreider is an author, historian, former member of a variety of Mennonite church boards and faculty emeritus of Bluffton (Ohio) University and Bethel College, North Newton, Kan.

The continuing pursuit of unity

by John A. Lapp

As a lad 70 years ago in Lansdale, Pa., I was aware that there were two kinds of Mennonites. Our Lapp family were Old Mennonites, while our Derstine Avenue neighbors, the Fretzes, were “New” Mennonites, the name given to members of the General Conference Mennonite Church. While the Lapps and Fretzes were friendly, we Old Mennonites were separatists when it came to church. We drew lines about worshipping together although we did share special occasions such as funerals or commemorative events. “Old” and “New” were not only chronological distinctions but also represented differences in church practices and attitudes toward change and the larger society.

Every healthy community and church has a normal dynamic between innovating and preserving mentalities. What happened in the 1840s was the breakdown of normality in eastern Pennsylvania. The old party lost its capacity to negotiate change.

The new party underestimated the significance of a church community across time. There was stubbornness and impatience. There were few vigorous mediating personalities. Both parties were weaker by failing to appreciate the other's point of view. Writing as an heir of

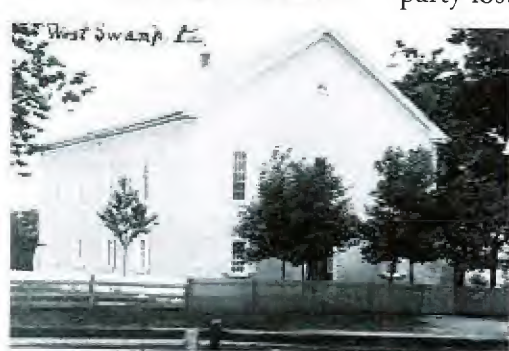
the old party and as one not adverse to the labels of “Old” or “New,” I deeply regret whenever and wherever the body of Christ is torn asunder. I rejoice when Christians demonstrate “that unity can one day be restored” so “they’ll know us by our love.”

One of the unique contributions of the GCMC was the way it highlighted unity as a central theme in identity and polity. The denomination rightly stressed this issue and active participants in the development of virtually all inter-Mennonite agencies formed in the 20th century, such as Mennonite Central Committee and Mennonite World Conference. Already in the late 1890s, the inter-Mennonite Home and Foreign Relief Commission represented four distinct Mennonite groups. When the GCMC sent its first missionaries to India, they were encouraged to position themselves close to the already settled Old Mennonite mission. After World War II there were hardly any new church programs that did not reflect the inter-Mennonite theme of cooperative ministry.

But there are always countervailing forces to uniting ministries. The need to maintain local ownership means center and periphery require sensitive balancing. The creation of Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada out of the GCMC and the Mennonite Church reflect

West Swamp Mennonite Church, Quakertown, Pa., ca. 1898, an important congregation among the “New” Mennonites of eastern Pennsylvania.

Mennonite Church USA Archives-North Newton



this consideration in church unity. The struggle between old and new, centralization versus decentralization, contrasting organizational styles and capturing the imagination of various generational interests underscores an understanding that unity requires patience, generosity of spirit, respect for diversity and noncompetitive relationships. The conspicuous affluence of North American Mennonites creates additional strains as new and autonomous church bodies or institutions can be readily established.

All of this suggests the heroic witness of the GCMC for unity and cooperation is not complete. The fragmentation of Mennonites is more conspicuous than ever, especially in Lancaster County, Pa., where



The other denominational anniversary

by Abe Dueck

The creation of the General Conference Mennonite Church was not the only denominational tremor of 1860. On January 6, nearly five months before representatives met at West Point, Iowa, a group of Mennonites met on the Molotschna Colony in Russia to break away from the main group, called the Kirchliche Mennonites, and formally create a new church, today known as the Mennonite Brethren.

The MB founders were influenced by two religious streams. First was Pietism. It entered the colonies in the early 19th century but didn't start to make a serious impact on Russian Mennonites until the mid-1840s with the arrival of Eduard Wust, a Lutheran Pietist from Germany. He pastored a congregation in the Molotschna area, and some Mennonites were soon paying attention to his preaching. The second factor in the fledgling church's development were Baptist beliefs, although that didn't occur until shortly after leaving the Kirchliche Mennonites. The traditional MB practice of baptism by immersion comes from the Baptists. In fact, the first MB confession of faith was the Baptist's Hamburg Confession of 1849, slightly modified to include a reference to nonresistance.

The Russian MB association with the Baptists continued well into the 20th century. They held a joint conference in 1882, and

I live. Indeed I wonder whether the effort devoted to maintaining current achievements is overwhelming the passion to extend the quest for unity among other Mennonite groups as well as with other churches.

We are now post-General Conference Mennonite Church. But the broadly practiced invitational style of the GCMC is still relevant. "That they may be one" was not idle talk for Jesus but a prayer for all those who follow his path. For Christ, unity was intended to be a priority in the practice of the church.

John A. Lapp is Mennonite Central Committee executive director emeritus and project coordinator and co-editor of Mennonite World Conference's "Global Anabaptist History" series.

a number of leaders went to the Baptist seminary in Hamburg, Germany. Abraham Friesen, the first Russian MB missionary to India, studied at Hamburg and served under the Baptists. Domestic evangelistic efforts were often jointly pursued.

When the Mennonite Brethren first arrived in North America in the 1870s, they lived mostly in sheltered rural communities. But by the mid-20th century, forces of acculturation and exposure led them to work more with evangelical and fundamentalist groups than with other Mennonites. The Mennonite Brethren strongly supported schools such as Wheaton College and Dallas Theological Seminary and revivalist preachers like Billy Graham. U.S. Mennonite Brethren joined the National Association of Evangelicals, while the Canadians joined the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada.

Such developments would eventually threaten the denomination's unity and cohesion. The MB Board of Reference and Counsel in 1951 called them "revolutionary changes" leading to an identity crisis. One response was the commission of a new church history, *Die Geschichte der Mennoniten-Brudergemeinde, 1860-1954* by A.H. Unruh. But it did not prove to be a rallying point because of conceptual limitations and because it was written in German. It wasn't until 1975 and John A. Toews' *A History of the Mennonite Brethren: Pilgrims and Pioneers* that the issue of identity was addressed. Toews took much of his inspiration from Harold S. Bender and his Goshen College associates who called for a "recovery of the Anabaptist vision."

Most MB institutions, including Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in Fresno, Calif., identified with the heritage as mediated through the Goshen historians. Therefore, although Mennonite Brethren would remain closely allied with evangelicals, they also affirm their Anabaptist identity and work with other Mennonites. The latest MB confession of faith is strongly Anabaptist in its commitments to discipleship, peace and reconciliation.

Excerpted from Mennonite Historian, publication of the Mennonite Heritage Centre and Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Canada.

Photo: *The interior of Reedley (Calif.) Mennonite Brethren Church, ca. 1954.*
Mennonite Church USA Archives-North Newton



What happened?

by Walter Sawatsky

At the time of its 100th anniversary in 1960, the General Conference Mennonite Church was optimistically preparing for its next chapter of mission and service. Around the world were 270 GCMC mission workers, including 37 appointed just the year before. The denomination had overhauled its organizational structure. Also observing its centennial were the Mennonite Brethren. GCMC president Erland Waltner went to the celebration in Reedley, Calif., to speak

words of reconciliation for the schism in Russia a century earlier that produced the new church. Meanwhile, a study conference led the GCMC to announce the exploration of possible ways of cooperation and joint activity with South American Mennonites and “other Mennonite conferences.” One such venture, Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries, was already in its early stages. One member of the class of 1960 was Vern Preheim, who would become GCMC general secretary and a driving force for merger with the Mennonite Church. It was a year for grand visions of ministry.

Over the next half century, the GCMC’s Commission on Overseas Mission established an extensive network of relationships with other Mennonite groups, working closely with the mission organizations of the Mennonite Church, Lancaster Conference and Mennonite Brethren, as well as with Mennonite Central Committee. Congo Inland Mission and its successor, Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission, brought together the GCMC with smaller conferences of more evangelical Mennonites. At the suggestion

of longtime denominational leader Henry Fast, GCMC involvement in Europe was done through MCC as a medium for cooperative work with Mennonite conferences on the continent. The other North American conferences maintained and developed more of their own mission projects in Western Europe. Another European initiative, usually together with MCC and the Mennonite Brethren and periodically with Mennonite World Conference, was developing connections with the long-isolated Mennonites in the Soviet Union.

As the inevitability of a denominational merger increased, however, GCMC mission activity decreased. In light of the 1995 decision to create what became Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada, COM decided not to undertake any new initiatives until they could be done in a new structure with their Mennonite Church colleagues. The final meeting of the COM board and staff in 2000 felt like a funeral, as if what had been had passed away. The early GCMC motto of “Unity in essentials, freedom in nonessentials and in all things love” had been replaced with wrangling over membership guidelines.

While the GCMC-Mennonite Church integration has meant new bridge-building in some areas, it has come at the cost of significantly reduced contacts in other areas. Church and conference partnerships with large sister churches in India, Congo and South America have lapsed, only partially replaced by new relations through MWC. Is an anniversary a moment to rethink what has happened?

Walter Sawatsky is professor of church history and mission and director of the Mission Study Center at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Ind.

A Mennonite baptism in Congo, 1973. Global relationships were a significant aspect of the General Conference Mennonite Church.

Mennonite Church USA Archives-North Newton



The minister and the coach

Correspondence reveals friendship despite differences

In Indiana, October is like Advent. It's a month of increasing anticipation for what many in the state would consider the most wonderful time of the year: basketball season. The state is legendary for its passion for the sport, and it is renewed every November when the state's college and high school teams take to the courts in pursuit of a season of roundball glory.

One of the highest profile participants in these annual ballads has been Bob Knight, the famously successful but volatile former head men's basketball coach at Indiana University. Now a decade since his departure, people within and beyond the state's borders seemingly either still love him unconditionally or despise him with blazing ferocity. His supporters mention not just Knight's three national championships or his 901 victories, the second-most by one college coach in history. His teams also avoided scandals and never ran afoul of National Collegiate Athletic Association rules while graduating a high percentage of players. His critics, meanwhile, cite his authoritarian style and explosive anger directed at his

players, referees, journalists, college employees, NCAA officials and others who didn't conduct themselves according to his expectations.

It might seem unlikely that a big-time college coach famous for his belligerence and his admiration for General George S. Patton would be friends with Mennonite minister and radio evangelist. But despite all their apparent differences in vocation, temperament and beliefs, Bob Knight and Bob Detweiler had at least one thing in common: they both came from Orrville, Ohio.

Detweiler was 9 years old when his family moved to Orrville in 1938. Two years earlier, his father, William G. Detweiler, had started *The Calvary Hour*, the first Mennonite radio ministry, and took it with him when he accepted a pastorate at Oak Grove Mennonite Church near Orrville. When William died unexpectedly in 1956, Bob and his twin brother, Bill, both in seminary in Philadelphia at the time, returned to carry on *The Calvary Hour*. Back in Orrville, the Detweilers were also able to witness the athletic accomplishments of teenager Knight, who excelled in basketball, football and baseball

Both coming from Orrville, Ohio, longtime Mennonite minister Bob Detweiler and college basketball coaching legend Bob Knight maintained a lifelong friendship that only ended with Detweiler's death in 1989.

at Orrville High School.

From Orrville, Knight went to Ohio State University and played on the Buckeyes' 1960 national championship team. After graduation, he spent one year at an Ohio high school before going to West Point to coach the Army men's basketball team, first as an assistant for two years then six as head coach. In 1971 he took the job at Indiana University, one of the most prestigious college basketball programs in the nation. But Knight's tenure at Indiana came to an end in 2000, following the revelation—accompanied by a videotape—of him with his hands around a player's neck during practice three years earlier. The next season he was head coach at Texas Tech, where he stayed until he retired in 2008.

Meanwhile, Detweiler spent the rest of his life in the ministry, pastoring at Martin's Mennonite Church, Orrville; College Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind.; and Yellow Creek Mennonite Church, Goshen. He and brother Bill, who spent his entire pastoral career at Oak Grove Mennonite Church near Orrville, continued the weekly broadcasts of *The Calvary Hour*. Bob also remained in contact with Knight. He was able to bring the coach to Goshen for a speaking engagement and enjoyed many Indiana basketball games thanks to complimentary tickets from Knight. The friendship died, however, when Detweiler succumbed to a massive heart attack in 1989 at the age of 59.

This summer Detweiler's personal papers were donated to the Mennonite Church USA Archives in Goshen, Ind. The collection includes his correspondence with Knight and related materials from 1971 to 1987. Following are several letters that provide some insight into the relationship of the combative coach and the Mennonite minister.

29 March 1971

Dear Bob:

Congratulations and welcome to Indiana! I was delighted to read in the papers and hear on our TV stations the word that you had accepted the position of Head coach at IU. You're the man for it, I'm sure and I believe you will find John Ritter, a Goshen lad, to be a very positive element in building the spirit and discipline you realize is so necessary.

You have not taken on an easy assignment but I have no doubt but that you can rebuild that which has fallen down; the material is there and all that is needed is a wise and firm foreman.

I find it personally gratifying to know that you are coming to Indiana. So often in past years I have had the intention of dropping you a note just to let you know that Bill and I were following the good fortunes of Army and rejoicing in the successes you built into the team there. Occasionally I have been able to see some of your games on TV ... particularly the NIT coverage.

I get to Orrville quite frequently for the sake of our broadcast; just four weeks ago I returned from a sabbatical leave of study at Princeton Seminary. I continue my assignment as Associate Pastor of the Goshen College Church and do a great deal of work with the students. Tomorrow night I will be heading for Ohio and on to eastern Pennsylvania with Bill; I'm sure a good bit of our discussion will be your shift from Army to IU. Both of us are as avid basketball fans as ever.

Bob, it is good to have you in Indiana. I hope that the time will come when you can visit us here in Goshen and I assure you of my full support at IU. My wife Marge joins in this note of welcome and congratulation.

Sincerely,
Bob Detweiler

March 14, 1973

Dear Bob:

Thank you very much for your letter of last week. The boy I mentioned to you concerning the letter I would like for you to write is to Kent Benson [in] New Castle, Indiana. Kent will probably be voted the outstanding player in the state this year and the 6'10", 220 pounds is just exactly what we need to take Steve Downing's place. There is no one I would rather have as a part of our program than him. He is very active in the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and is President of the local chapter. It would be very helpful to him if you would let him know what you think of our program and the type of boys our players are from the standpoint of your position in the ministry. His family is Catholic and our chief competitor is Notre Dame. If you could tell him what your thoughts are in regard to what we stand for, I think it would be very meaningful.

I will look forward to visiting with you when the season is over and when I am in Northern Indiana. I greatly appreciate your help with Benson.

Sincerely,
Bob Knight
Basketball Coach

At Bob Knight's request, Bob Detweiler on several occasions wrote letters to high school players that Knight was recruiting to play for Indiana University. Those letters were sent to players for whom moral environment was an important factor in choosing a school. One of those letters was to Kent Benson of New Castle, Ind. The state boy's basketball player of the year in 1973, he went to Indiana, where he

had an outstanding career. Benson was twice named All-American and was an integral part of the Hoosiers' undefeated 1975-76 season, which concluded with the first national championship for a Knight-coached team. After his Indiana career, Benson was the first player selected in the National Basketball Association's 1977 college draft and played professionally for 11 seasons.

March 19, 1973

Dear Kent:

I am sure you will think it strange to receive this letter from me for you have no idea who I am and I know you only through what I have read in the papers and heard on the media. But I do want to share with many others in congratulating you upon the completion of a most outstanding high school basketball career.

I am aware, too, that you are identified with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and this makes me doubly happy for I know well the work of FCA and am a supporter of it.

Just a few things regarding myself may help give you the perspective from which I write. I am a minister here at the Goshen College Church, a congregation of more than 900 members living in this community. The church is located at the heart of the Goshen College campus and we have about 1300 students. Through the years of my Christian ministry I have been privileged to work with many young people and to share with them in many of their concerns. And it's been great!

But perhaps the most significant thing I can say about myself is that my "home-town" is Orrville, Ohio. Undoubtedly you recognized this to be the same Ohio town as the one from which Bob Knight, IU basketball coach, has come.

I have known Bobby Knight since the time he was a boy playing junior and senior high basketball for the Orrville Red Riders. I was just out of seminary and taking up my first pastorate when I learned to know him. I tried to see most of his games and through this initial association came to develop a close friendship with him even though I am ten years older than he. During his basketball days at Ohio State and on to West Point we maintained this relationship even though we did not have opportunity to be together as much as in his high school days. As a matter of fact, even though he was not a member of my congregation, he often came to hear me preach when I was ministering in one of the Orrville churches. He told me once that if I was willing to watch him play basketball he was willing to hear me preach! A number of times he came to my home just to "talk things over."

Naturally, I was extremely happy when I learned of his coming to Indiana to assume the head coaching job at IU. I know some of the turmoil he went through in arriving at the decision to leave Army and come to Bloomington. Here in Indiana I have visited with him on numerous occasions and try to see some of the games at IU. I only wish my schedule would permit me to see more of them. He has compiled a 38-13 record to date (if I've figured correctly) and I really believe he has a

chance of pulling the "upset of the decade" this Saturday when IU takes on UCLA. I am sure I am a bit biased but I feel that Knight is the most outstanding coach in the business today. His influence was felt first on the Atlantic coast and now his style is shaping the "Big Ten" and beyond.

I have been a little upset by some of the journalistic sensationalism that has attempted to picture him as irate and short-tempered. He is very intense and gives all he has to give to the game. But he is not at all as some reporters have depicted him. The Bob Knight I know really is "a gentle sort of man." His intensity grows out of a loyalty to his players and a concern for the team effort of which he is so much a part. I am confident that should you ever play for him you would find him to be tough, but above all fair, genuine, a man of high principles and character. This is the Bobby Knight I know and strongly admire. I wish you could talk with a guy like John Ritter who has played for him and is, incidentally, a neighbor of mine. These fellows, like Ritter, know that he demands their best and will not settle for second best. But at the same time he brings out their full potential.

I know also that in Bob Knight you would find a man who not only supports you as a Christian but encourages you in it. Personally, I hope that wherever you attend you will identify yourself continually with FCA and other organizations such as Inter-Varsity. I find the mood on our nation's campuses to be very receptive to the witness of fellow students. I am sure that no matter where you attend you will use your influence wisely.

You are facing a very important decision. It is your decision to make under the direction of God's Spirit. I have tried only to relate a few things which may counter-balance some of the sensationalism of some reporters ... and to put in a good word for the Bob Knight I know well. Even more than this I want to encourage you in your Christian faith.

I appreciate that you have taken time to read these paragraphs from one you don't even know. If you perchance have any questions you would like to ask concerning Coach Knight, I will be glad to try to answer them to the best of my knowledge ... not primarily to help in recruiting you for IU, but in an effort to help you better know the Bob Knight I know and admire.

In any case be assured of my best wishes for a truly great college career both on the court and off of it but always as Christ's person. I shall follow you with interest and hope to have the good fortune of meeting you.

Sincerely yours,
Rev. J. Robert Detweiler, Associate Pastor

September 1, 1979

Dear Dr. Ryan:

It is incredible that the incident associated with Bob Knight and the recent Pan Am games continues to get the front page coverage it does. I feel the publicity is quite often lopsided and subjective. The whole thing should have been resolved weeks ago.

I want to commend and thank you for the position you and the University have taken in supporting Knight and refusing to give consideration to his tendered resignation as Coach. And inasmuch as many are speaking out, I'd like to share a few comments of my own.

I have known Bob Knight since he was a Junior High student back in Orrville, Ohio. To both us Orville is "home town." Just out of seminary and in my first pastorate in Orrville, Knight was frequently present when I filled the pulpit of the Orrville Methodist Church. And I attended all his games which I could. Our friendship has continued through the years and I was elated when Coach Knight made his decision to come to Indiana University from West Point. His record at IU speaks for itself.

Without doubt Bob Knight is a high-strung thoroughbred. Not always might I choose to react to a situation in the same manner he does. You and I both know that each individual has his own God-given personality which manifests itself in differing styles. Knight's style is intense, forthright, point-blank. For some this characteristic is a demerit; to me it is a merit.

I recall, for example, that one time he told me with a twinkle, "I'm more honest than you. If a person does something you don't like, you go to him, put your arm around him and say, 'You know, you did something which hurt my feelings.' If you were as honest as I am, you would look him straight in the eyeball and say, 'You made me pretty damn mad.'" That's Bobby Knight. And he made a point well taken by a minister!

Let me share two additional observations:

(1) Bob Knight has a past record of staunch honesty and integrity. We need not be concerned that he will be caught in NCAA recruiting violations, etc. He declares himself in black and white and leaves very little gray area. He sticks by his words. This was clearly demonstrated last December when some of the team members admitted to using some marijuana. There was no bending of his principles even though to do so might have been self-serving and in the minds of some beneficial to the University. He is demanding yet equally loyal. His has a high sense of duty and honor and would be among

the last to bait or demean a law officer. He is both sensitive and sensible. He is a family man whose life has not been tarnished by divorce or hanky-pank. I have been in his home and see him cheer the sagging spirits of such as a deflated old coach by the name of Clair Bee. Why are some the writers so oblivious to these facets of the man's personality? Might it be that their own standards suffer by comparison? At any rate I know him to be a man marked by honesty and so when he speaks out I really have no reason to question him. When he says he is not guilty of the charges as leveled by a Puerto Rican policeman, I take him at his word. I don't know Juan de Silva. But I do know Knight and have known him for more than 20 years.

(2) I suspect that when all the data is in and the bottom line emerges it will become apparent there was a devised scheme to harrass [sic] and provoke Knight until he made some chargeable offense. It may well have been part of a carefully contrived plan to gain psychological advantage in the games. I have seen more bizarre tactics than this attempted. Indeed the ultimate goal may have been to have Knight behind bars for the final game with Puerto Rico. Hardly will a careful look into this possibility be initiated by the Puerto Rican authorities. In any event it is clear that the coaches and team played in a hostile environment amid psychological deterrents contrived to negate the effectiveness of their performance. That under these conditions the team was undefeated is a plus to both coaches and players.

I have had no communication whatsoever with Knight since before the Pan Am games. Probably Bobby is able to take it in stride. But no decent purpose is served by having this issue drag on and on. I urge you to do all in your power to serve the public with an account on all the known facts. I would like to see the University issue a final statement and then have the matter put to rest once and for all. Thank you for all you have done up to this point. I have also written to Governor Bowen expressing appreciation for his stand.

As I stated earlier, Bob Knight is a high-strung thoroughbred. Yet there is no doubt that he is the "Secretariat" of the coaching profession. And an honest gentleman to go with it. Best wishes to you and the University you head.

Sincerely yours,
Rev. Bob Detweiler

One of the most infamous incidents in Bob Knight's turbulent career came in the summer of 1979 as coach of the U.S. men's basketball team playing in the Pan American Games in Puerto Rico. He and police officer Jose de Silva got into a confrontation over the use of a practice court, during which Knight hit de Silva. (He argued that

de Silva first poked him in the eye.) Knight was arrested, but after winning the gold medal game, he and the rest of the American team returned to the mainland. He was tried in absentia, found guilty and sentenced to six months in prison, but Knight was never extradited. Puerto Rico dropped the matter in 1987.

September 7, 1979

Dear Bobby,

Hopefully you and your family have had a good summer in spite of all the ludicrous fanfare growing out of the Pan Am games. I have never before in the annals of sports reporting seen such a senseless "tempest in a teapot." Some members of the irresponsible press are largely to blame.

For example, I could not help but note the progressive "slanted" reporting. Initial accounts indicated that as a reflex action you "pushed" de Silva. Now they are reporting it as the "slugging" incident. That is nasty and unfair evolution of press standards and reflects more on them than their "victim."

Enclosed are copies of letters which I have sent in recent days to President John Ryan and Governor Bowen. They are very similar in content and I wanted you and Nancy to know of the support you are getting from this corner. I commended both of them for the support they have given you. I know that my expressions to them represent hundreds of others.

I trust that this all will very quickly be put to rest and forgotten so that you can focus on the up-coming season. I am eager for it to begin. I hope that it will be a season filled with both success and satisfaction for you.

Should you ever get up this way and have a little time, I would very much wish you to stop for a cup of coffee. Bill joins me in supporting you and wishing you both the very best in the coming months.

Hang in and let the devil run down his own lies!

Very sincerely,
Bob Detweiler



September 17, 1979

Dear Bob:

Thank you very much taking the time to drop me a note. I really appreciate your thoughtfulness in doing so.

Hopefully, we have put the Puerto Rican situation in a position where it will be behind us.

We are in the process of trying to get ready for the upcoming season and have been very pleased with the efforts that our players have into things since school as started.

I have enclosed one of our schedules so you can make some plans to come down whenever you can do so.

I hope the summer was most enjoyable for you and your family.

Sincerely yours,
Bob Knight
Basketball Coach



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Some GCMC perspective

Well-known churchman Peter J. Dyck was, like me, from a solid General Conference Mennonite Church background. So I once asked him why he went to Goshen College, a Mennonite Church school, during an era when MC-GCMC differences were still quite striking. He replied that he wanted to study “at the feet of H.S. Bender.”

It was, at that time, a fascinating answer. Now some 20 years later, it is downright revelatory. Surely, I had pondered, there had to have been great GCMC minds who could have provided Dyck comparable instruction in matters of Mennonite life and thought. No, I eventually had to admit, there weren’t.

Not that the GCMC intellectual cabinet was completely bare. J. Winfield Fretz made a name for himself with his studies of mutual aid. C. Henry Smith was the church’s leading historian in the first half of the 1900s. Cornelius Krahn was an authority on Dutch Anabaptism. But they had little company.

Meanwhile, the Mennonite Church was producing men such as Bender, of “Anabaptist Vision” fame; Guy F. Hershberger, author of the seminal *War, Peace and Nonresistance*; and pre-eminent institution-builder Orie Miller. Bender and Hershberger were colleagues on the Goshen faculty, who in turn spawned the post-World War II Concern Movement, which was made up exclusively of MC members. George R. Brunk I and II together shaped conservative Mennonitism for virtually the entire 20th century. And the list could go

on and on.

A primary reason for this discrepancy between the denominations is that the Mennonite Church had a tradition of granting authority, either formally or informally, to individuals and then heeding them to various degrees. For the GCMC, its genius and its bane was its congregational polity, which stymied the development of strong churchwide leadership to help the denomination intellectually navigate the changes challenging their faith.

Rather, the GCMC excelled administratively—denominationally but also in Civilian Public Service, Mennonite Central Committee, Mennonite World Conference. They were, to borrow a phrase, dedicated company men. But that didn’t necessarily translate into clear discernment of faith’s theological and ethical moorings. Which would help explain, for example, why through the years so many more GCMC members joined the military compared with the MC counterparts.

So as this issue of *Mennonite Historical Bulletin*

rightly celebrates what would have been the 150th anniversary of the General Conference Mennonite, it is important to keep some perspective.

—Rich Preheim

